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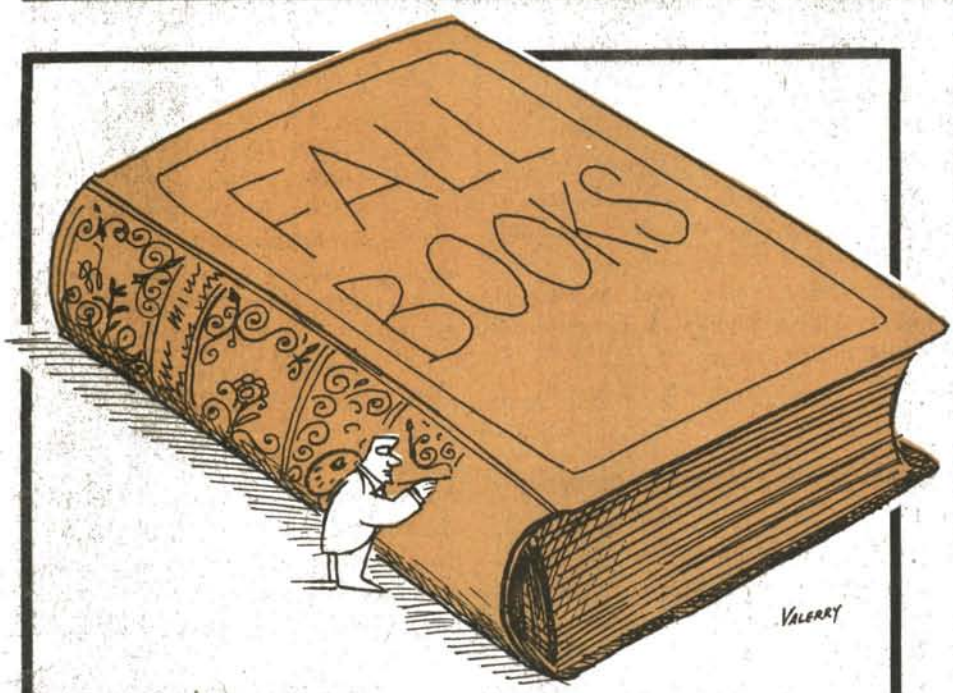

ELIE WIESEL: WHY I WRITE

THE NOBEL PRIZE WINNER TALKS WITH HARRY JAMES CARGAS

Michael Harrington
PETER BERGER'S CASE FOR CAPITALISM

John Deedy
ANDREW GREELEY'S TRUE CONFESSIONS

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'THE LOST LANGUAGE OF CRANES'

Paul M. Van Buren
PINCHAS LAPIDE, JEWISH CHRISTOLOGIST

John Patrick Diggins
THE CONSTITUTION

Peadar Kirby
IN SEARCH OF 'LIBERATION'

ALSO: HARVEY COX: **CORITA KENT** ● RAYMOND A. SCHROTH: **THURSTON DAVIS** ● J.V. LONG: **SHORT STORIES** ● KAREN SUE SMITH: **'MONKEYS'** ● TOM O'BRIEN: **'THE NAME OF THE ROSE'** ● **PONSOT, ANNE PORT**

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Correspondence

CONTEMPLATION & CONTROVERSY

A MONASTERY FOR AUSCHWITZ?

Chicago, Ill.

To the Editors: Eva Fleischner has performed a genuine service for Jews and Catholics in North America with her fine summary of the ongoing controversy regarding the Carmelite monastery at Auschwitz ["Contemplation & Controversy," June 20]. This controversy which was quite heated in Europe (especially France, Holland, and Belgium) for months is only now beginning to penetrate the North American scene. Her comprehensive piece, especially in the way it sensitively lays out the major points of contention, provides a much needed framework for the discussion as it grows over here.

The controversy, I hope, will result in some new learning by all sides. The Polish church may come to better appreciate the uniqueness of the Nazi assault against the Jews and begin to press for a more faithful portrayal of this uniqueness at the Auschwitz state memorial. Western Jews and Christians, on the other hand, may finally come to appreciate the full nature of the Nazi attack on the Polish nation as nation — the attempt to reduce it to utter servitude and completely eliminate its intellectuals as well as its political, religious, and cultural leadership.

As the initial dust settles regarding the convent proposal, I see the need for an international commission of prominent Jews and Christians to offer recommendations to the Polish church regarding a proper religious memorial at Auschwitz. In the meantime, nothing should be done to upgrade the present rather inconspicuous convent, and all ties should be broken with the Aid to the Church in Distress organization as several prominent European Catholic bishops have urged.

(REV.) JOHN T. PAWLIKOWSKI, O.S.M.

Morally fitting

To the Editors: One fact alone, I think, makes the presence of a Carmelite convent at Auschwitz both historically relevant and morally fitting. It was at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942 that Edith Stein — Jewish philosopher, convert to Catholicism, and Carmelite nun — perished as a witness to the suffering Christ in this century.

ROBERT DEL VALLE

The bitterness remains

Baltimore, Md.

To the Editors: As a practicing Jewish congregant who is a Jewish believer, it is hard to explain to the Christian community why the Holocaust survivors would object to a Carmelite convent at Auschwitz. The Holocaust to the survivors was something they can never expiate, and it haunts the Jews who were safe. In fact it scares us. The Jewish community is up tight about conversions to another religion . . . . All of us, Jews and Christians, must work for a better society, and perhaps one day the bitterness will fade.

MELVIN N. COHEN

What's in a name?

Silver Spring, Md.

To the Editors: Professor Eva Fleischner's "Contemplation & Controversy" stands as a shining example of scholarly and sensitive treatment of a "touchy" issue. My thanks both to Dr. Fleischner for having written, and to the editors for its publication. I would just like to add a couple of points I feel are pertinent to the full understanding of the issues involved.

What's in a name? During their World War II occupation of Poland, the Nazis changed the ancient Polish names of most towns and villages. The change in the areas "incorporated" into the Reich was total. Thus the ancient Oświęcim became, for the duration, "Auschwitz." In that locality, and later in the neighboring Brzezinka (Birkenau) the Nazis erected a complex of concentration camps notorious to the world as Auschwitz-Birkenau, or simply as Auschwitz. After the war, the towns and villages reverted to their historic names, while the site of the camp complex retained the designation Auschwitz as a sign of perpetual infamy. No one *in Poland* confuses Auschwitz with Oświęcim. My understanding, borne out by Dr. Fleischner's article, is that the convent is situated in Oświęcim not in Auschwitz.

Dr. Fleischner is correct when she writes, "Auschwitz is situated in the diocese of Cardinal Franciscus Macharski, Archbishop of Cracow." The irony is that *Oświęcim* is a hereditary duchy of the bishops of Cracow. Thus the controversy is over a Catholic prince/bishop permitting erection of a Catholic house of prayer within the precincts of his ducal see!

Auschwitz was originally erected by the Nazis as a concentration camp for Poles. Birkenau was added a year later (1941) as a *lager* for Polish women, with the initial "transport" of eight thousand "politicals" collected from Gestapo jails in Cracow, Myslowice, and Fordon and from the enormous Warsaw *lapankas* (street roundups). Of that eight thousand,

(Continued on page 573)

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Contents

Volume CXIII, Number 18

Correspondence 546

Editorials 547

What's on your minds?: *Raymond A. Schroth* 548

Surviving with style: *Harvey Cox* 549

In search of 'liberation': *Peadar Kirby* 551

Screen: *Tom O'Brien* 553

Verse: *Anne Porter*, 554, *C.W. Pratt*, 557 *Marie Ponsot* 566

Messenger for the ten thousandth: an interview with Elie Wiesel *Harry James Cargas* 555

Books

The Capitalist Revolution: *Michael Harrington* 558

The Lost Language of Cranes: *Robert Jones* 558

Confessions of a Parish Priest: *John Deedy* 560

Portrait of Delmore/The Middle Generation: *Robert Phillips* 562

The Resurrection of Jesus/Jesus in Two Perspectives/The Sermon on the Mount: *Paul M. van Buren* 564

The Beet Queen: *Linda Simon* 565

A Machine that Would Go by Itself: *John Patrick Diggins* 567

One Way or Another/The Piano Tuner/Success Stories/The News from Ireland: *J.V. Long* 570

Monkeys: *Karen Sue Smith* 572

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WHICH FUTURE FOR FARMING?

"WE REGRET to inform you that a review of your Farmers Home Administration loan account indicates the need to take adverse action." To the more than 65,000 U.S. farmers who, this year, face debt restructuring or foreclosure, this letter from the government's lending agency of last resort says it all. Their land, livelihood, and way of life are in jeopardy. Yet the economic collapse comes as no surprise. Agriculture, America's largest industry, is in serious condition. How serious is suggested not only by the recent record number of farm foreclosures since the Great Depression, but by the figures last May which marked the first one-month U.S. farm trade deficit in almost thirty years.

It appears that the shift away from government subsidies to stabilize prices, begun in the 1930s, toward subsidized credit and tax incentives to increase production, begun in the 1970s, has failed the farmers.

These programs, in effect, drove farmers into specialized crop production, and into deeper and deeper debt for purchases of additional acreage and heavy equipment. Then, when the world fell into recession in the eighties, the value of the dollar soared, land values plummeted, and foreign markets dried up, many U.S. farmers, like many debtor nations, found themselves unable to repay their creditors. Meanwhile, thanks both to technological advancement and to the incentive provided by the high dollar, some third-world countries, formerly food importers, became agriculturally self-sufficient. Still others became food exporters, competing with the U.S., the world's largest exporter of food.

The result has been a harvest of ironies: record crops and successive food surpluses forcing U.S. prices (and farmers' incomes) down, while creating the additional problem of paying billions for food storage; record government subsidies for farmers (around $30 billion this year) in face of delayed debt repayment, compounding the federal deficit; and inevitably, fewer and fewer farmers.

Since 1980, the rate of farm population decline — a steady 1 million farmers per decade since World War II — has doubled. Simultaneously, agribusiness and farm-management companies have grown. Today nearly half of the nation's food comes from 4 percent of farms with $200,000 in sales; not exactly the "family farm." And lenders who foreclosed on smaller farmers have hired management companies to work the land in order to repay the debts outstanding, spawning the boom in land-management firms. The number of farms overseen by such companies is predicted to encompass one-quarter of the nation's cropland by 1991, at the present growth rate. Is this the direction we want agriculture to be going? Consider the recent purchase by Metropolitan Life of the nation's largest farm management business, Farmers National Company in Omaha, which manages over one million acres of farmland.

Some analysts see no problem with the shrinking number of farmers or with the

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centralization of land in the hands of a few huge conglomerates. They argue that underlying the "crisis" is the governmental blunder of protectionism which has shielded farmers from the rigors of a free-market economy and undermined efficiency, all at unwarranted taxpayer expense. Farming, they say, is a business just like any other, and this situation calls for fewer farmers, more efficient farms, and production that matches, not exceeds, demand. All this could be accomplished by a self-regulating market economy without government controls.

However, behind the rhetoric of market efficiency lies the unacknowledged premise: if government policy created today's plight for the medium-sized farmer, it also created the opportunity seized by agribusiness. Could it undo both? Aside from the myriad questions a centralized farming economy must pose for Americans, changes in government subsidies could effect corporation-owned as well as family-owned farms.

How then should government policies be redirected? Should such policies foster a centralized business model or preserve small- and medium-size farms and the farm culture associated with them?

The U.S. Catholic bishops, writing in the food and agriculture section of their draft pastoral letter on the economy (chapter 5), reject the business model. "Farmers and farm workers are not just another category of business entrepreneurs and hired laborers," they say as they urge federal policymakers to give priority to family farmers with less than $200,000 in annual sales. The bishops suggest that government could:

- Limit income support payments to those farmers with genuine need. Most farmers are now eligible, and present payments tend to increase in proportion to acreage, benefiting most the largest producers.
- Place a ceiling on payments to any one producer, carefully thwarting the practice of some producers who divide large parcels of land into smaller units to collect multiple subsidies.
- Utilize mandatory production controls to reduce surpluses, thereby increasing prices and income to farmers.
- Close tax incentives for non-farmers seeking tax shelters. That means limiting the use of farm losses to reduce taxes on non-farm income; making capital depreciation on equipment follow rather then exceed the actual decline in value; removing tax subsidies on capital gains which encourage investments in farming equipment and land expansion.

Fortunately, the Tax Reform Bill does include several general proposals which also apply to farming, such as reducing losses from passive investments, more realistic depreciation rates, and taxing capital gains at the standard income rate. In addition, several bills in Congress look promising.

The Save the Family Farm Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Representative Richard A.Gephardt (D-Missouri), is consonant with the goals of the bishops in two respects: the central priority of saving the family farm, and claiming the necessity of mandatory production controls. The bill's purpose is to cut production, and thereby reduce surpluses, raise prices and farmer income, while simultaneously decreasing government subsidies. Currently, taxpayers underwrite federal subsidies to farmers; under this bill, consumers would bear a 3-5 percent price increase at the grocery store instead. Whether these costs would cancel each other out is not certain. But the problems with the bill are obvious: prices, if driven up, would be uncompetitive on the world market which is one reason behind present federal subsidies; and cuts in production mean reducing farm acreage. That's bad news for one-third of the nation's family farmers already on the brink of bankruptcy. And while the bill calls for production limits of less than 35 percent for any single commodity, curbing to a degree reduced acreage, the effects of such a program seem uncertain at home and unrealistic abroad.

Senator Robert Dole (R-Kansas) has proposed an export subsidy program for corn, wheat, and soybeans that would work like current subsidies for cotton and rice. Shippers would sell products at world prices — about half U.S. prices — with the federal government paying shippers the difference. This plan resembles price supports to farmers, only here the incentive goes to shippers who must find markets for farmers' goods, benefiting them indirectly. This proposal addresses the international market dilemma. It does not address the taxpayers' burden or the specific plight of family farmers.

Perhaps only a combination of strategies will solve this complex conundrum: government policies coupled with farmers' cooperatives, diversified crops, and a recommitment to thrift even after existing farm debts are restructured. Nevertheless, two questions — apparently, but not inevitably representing conflicting interests — must be squarely faced. What kind of farmers and farm culture are we willing to support at home? How can our import/export policies cultivate continued agricultural self-sufficiency for nations abroad?

FARMING hasn't been a way of life for most Americans for many years, but its place in the national psyche remains strong. It is camaraderie, not mere romanticism, that sends city slickers to the corner kiosk to buy *Mother Earth News*, or to the department store for overalls. Kinship with nature lies at the root of the rooftop gardens, green-thumb public plots, and herbs on window sills. And even though the Sunday drive through the country is no longer an institution, it is comforting to know the fields are still there.

Neither the inevitable modernization of the family farm — air-conditioned cabs on combines and stretching parcels of land — nor the rise of agribusiness has yet disfigured the portrait of the American farmer. The image is one of independence, sweatful toil over one's own land, struggles against locusts, flood, and drought within a small-town, community lifestyle that produces good country people, honest, hard-working, neighborly. Will the image fade? Perhaps not as long as there are two kinds of people in this country: those who think a farmer is primarily a businessman, and the rest of us who don't.

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THE FAST & THE DEAD

For over a month, four U.S. war veterans — Charles Liteky, George Mizo, Brian Willson, and Duncan Murphy — have been fasting on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. They fast on water only, looking to America. The four have shown gallantry in two different wars: Murphy in World War II, from North Africa to the freeing of the Belsen concentration camp, Liteky, Mizo, and Willson in Vietnam for which Liteky received the Congressional Medal of Honor and Mizo a Purple Heart. Now they have undertaken the most serious mission of their lives: to awaken the conscience of a nation, and to doit at a personal cost.

The four are protesting U.S. policy in Central America, specifically U.S. sponsorship of the *contras* in Nicaragua. They are protesting the $100 million approved by Congress this summer for the *contras*, money that is likely to cause far more than four untimely deaths. And they are questioning the silence they hear across America, a silence they can only interpret as acquiescence to the government's choice of policy, a silence they themselves knew and participated in too long in the vietnam era.

When four mercenaries with U.S. connections were shot down flying a C123 military transport over Nicarauga earlier this month, Washington denied involvement. How were they borne hence, these four, capable of shattering the lives of whole villages? One does not have to be a faster to discern the likely answers.

The other four meanwhile continue to sit quietly on the steps of the Capitol, their faces set on that different mission. Their fast is directed not only at the governing but at the governed: Do not be silent they say. Liteky, Mizo, Willson, and Murphy believe that it is the people of the United States who are the hope of peace in Central America, a people that surely must not have forgotten the lessons of Vietnam. They are asking us to speak now: for their lives, and the lives of many.

Thurston Davis, S.J.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MINDS?

'FATHER,' EDITOR, TEACHER

THE DAY Thurston Noble Davis, S.J., died in New York, September 17, 1986, I was telling college freshmen in New Orleans of his influence on me. Thirty-five years ago, with his prominent jaw, glossy, black hair, and sonorous, theatrically-modulated voice, he had stood before my freshman class at Fordham as our dean and exhorted us to "*plunge in.*" We did.

Few would argue that this complex, Harvard disciple of classicist Werner Jaeger mastered the common touch. Even as a high school student, I am told, he was "paternal" with his peers. Once at Fordham he called the Honors Program into his office and asked the bewildered group, "Well, boys, what's on your minds?" — as if *we* had set up the meeting. The class mimics would imitate him "spontaneously" joining students at a cafeteria table — as if he were King-Saint Louis IX of France receiving his subjects under a tree — and groping for something ordinary to say.

Meanwhile, in his four years as dean, he started the Honors Program and Junior Year Abroad, forced faculty to assign outside readings, instituted three-hour exams, combined the graduate and undergraduate faculties, and made Fordham academically respectable.

Fordham liberals had feared that Thurston's transfer to *America* in 1953 was a move to mute editor Robert C. Hartnett, S.J.'s anti-McCarthyism and make *America* more conservative. Some of his pieces were "conservative" in tone — like the clever 1955 essay, reprinted in *Time*, deploring Madison Avenue's "meretricious" corruption of the language; but Thurston Davis's *America* (1955-1968) was not a conservative magazine. Except for Vietnam — where, as late as 1968, *America* editorials referred to the "so-called" peace movement — it provided progressive leadership and lively debate on the great controversies of the 1960s: racial justice, religious liberty, contraception, divorce and remarriage, the Kennedy candidacy, poverty, liturgy, and ecumenism. Ivan Illich's "The Seamy Side of Charity" (January 21, 1967), lambasted the American church for sending its clergy and money to Latin America and infuriated Richard Cardinal Cushing, whom Thurston had cultivated as a benefactor of the new John LaFarge Institute and America House on West 56th Street. When *America* columnist, English theologian Charles Davis, rocked the church by leaving it in 1966, *America* discussed his departure with sympathy and candor.

But what leaps from these old *Americas* as I re-read them today is their concern for the young. In 1965 Thurston brought me on board as a summer editor and columnist even before I was ordained; through me, I think, he hoped to hear the voices of students I knew and taught. Meanwhile he filled the pages with editorials, articles, symposia, and letters about the "New Breed," the "rebellious" sixties generation, their struggles with the faith, their alienation, and their commitment to change.

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Now I see how the journalist remained always the educator, always the dean. Whatever cool, lofty remoteness masked his warmth, Thurston Davis was forever — symbolically — calling young people into his office and asking, "What's on your minds?"

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

(Father Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., is associate professor in the communications department at Loyola University of New Orleans.)

Corita Kent

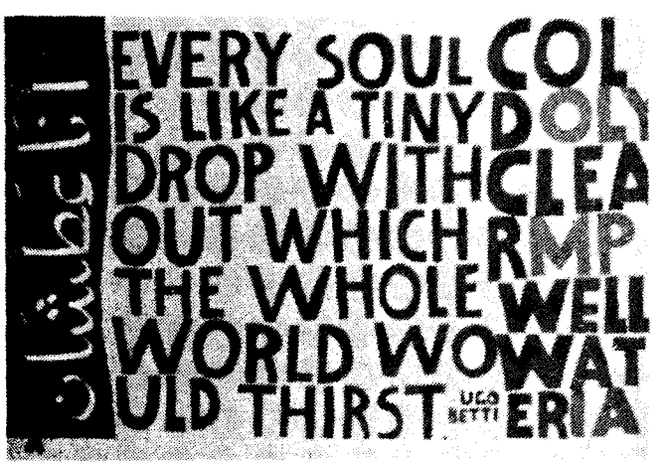
SURVIVING WITH STYLE

URBAN GUERRILLA WITH PAINT BRUSH

WHEN Corita Kent died here in Boston last month, the first thing I thought of was a splendid evening we shared sometime around 1970 which we called "A Peace of Bread." The title, of course, was one of her puns. We invited lots of people — many hundreds came — to a gathering for song, poetry, art, and the sharing of bread, all as a celebration of life and a protest against the war in Vietnam.

It was a great evening. Micki Myers, Corita's talented young protégée, had done a lot of the preparation. The lighting was classical late-sixties. The mood was upbeat. People obviously wanted to say and do something positive and affirming, not just continue to say "no" to the war. It was also the time when the vague oriental wave had already crested and many young people were looking to Christianity again.

Dan Berrigan was there, reading his poetry, a garland of carnations and daisies around his neck. Judy Collins, Corita's friend, threw back her head and sang a couple of her best songs, including — as I recall — "Clouds." I was a sort of master of ceremonies. But the high point was Corita. High because it was so low profile, so unassuming, so matter-of-fact. She simply showed some slides and talked about a disturbed and painfully shy little girl she had helped to lead out of her pain and withdrawal by teaching her how to draw a large sunflower. She ended by saying something which, when I write it down now, sounds hopelessly trite. But when she said it that night it was anything but ordinary. I forget the exact words, but it had to do with bringing out — into visibility and color and texture and light — the flower inside each of us.



Why is it that I forget almost everyting about the rest of that evening, but I remember Corita — small, fragile, earnest, speaking almost shyly about something which, at least on the surface seemed to have little to do with the bombing of Hanoi?

I think it is because Corita had a complex kind of simplicity. She combined a childlike innocence with the kind of wisdom one finds more often among very old women. She mixed being serene with being high-strung. Above all, she had a certain indefatigable resiliency. She was a fighter who not only survived the scarring battles the Immaculate Heart Sisters lived through but did it with verve. Of all her slogan posters I think I like "Survival with Style" the best. That's who Corita was, a survivor with style.

Corita Kent also won my heart because she had an *urban* sensibility. She loved the city. She reveled in the junk and handouts and throwaways and labels and ads that most people experience merely as a suffocating wave of mind-deadening trivia. For her they provided the endlessly fascinating material for her lively and playful art. In this sense Corita was profoundly sacramental and very, very "Catholic." The world of signs and sales slogans and plastic containers was not, for her, an empty wasteland. It was the dough out of which she baked the bread of life. Like a priest, a shaman, a magician, she could pass her hands over the commonest of the everyday, the superficial, the oh-so-ordinary, and make it a vehicle of the luminous, the only, and the hope-filled.

Every time I drive to the Cape I go by the huge oil storage tank she splashed with her famous, colossal squiggly daubs. There they are, assertively antic, endlessly making gentle fun of the bizarrely inappropriate structure they are splashed over. When I see them I always smile. No matter how horrendous the traffic is on the Southeast Expressway, no matter how bad a day it has been, my spirits are always lifted. For Corita "art" did not belong under glass. Art meant transforming even the ugliest parts of the urban environment into testimonies of joy. She was an urban guerrilla with a paint brush.

I have not driven by that tank since Corita died. The next time I do I know I'll feel a stab of sadness. There are so many girders and stanchions and dreary warehouses and pipelines that still invite her magic touch. She's gone now. But I hope somewhere little girls and boys are letting the flowers within come out, and some adults are remembering that even something as banal as Wonderbread can taste great if you know how to serve it up.

Corita did not survive her last battle, but she lived — and died — with style. For that I'll always be thankful.

HARVEY COX

(Harvy Cox teaches at Harvard Divinity School. His most recent book is Religion in the Secular City, *published by Simon & Schuster.)*

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THREE EUROPEAN CARDINALS VISIT LATIN AMERICA

In search of 'liberation'

PEADAR KIRBY

IT IS VERY difficult to communicate to senior churchmen through the medium of ideas alone what is really happening in the Latin American church, Father Leonardo Boff told me in Rio de Janeiro recently. "They must come and experience it for themselves," he said.

Three European cardinals did just that this summer. The cardinals and their particular destinations were highly significant, showing that they came for more than the pleasant climate.

The two countries visited, Brazil and Peru, have been at the center of Vatican moves on liberation theology in recent years. The person at the center of those moves, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, visited Peru as the guest of its bishops' conference for a week in late July. It was a set of negative "observations" on the theology of Lima priest Gustavo Gutierrez sent by Cardinal Ratzinger to the Peruvian bishops' conference in early 1983 which opened the recent series of Vatican moves on liberation theology.

Brazil, which later came center stage in the liberation theology controversy with the summoning of Father Leonardo Boff to Rome in September 1984 and his subsequent silencing for almost a year, was the destination of Utrecht's Cardinal Adrian Simonis and Cardinal Jerome Hamer, prefect of the Congregation of Religious. Under Cardinal Hamer's direct scrutiny come the many religious who are at the forefront of liberation theology and the pastoral practice derived from it. Both have caused deep tensions between the Brazilian church and Rome in recent years. Cardinal Simonis's appointment as Dutch primate, it will be remembered, was widely regarded as a papal move to bring the rebel Dutch church into line.

In themselves, these visits could be seen as an indication of the Vatican's now apparent new openness toward liberation theology, expressed in last March's second Instruction on the subject and most especially in the pope's warm letter to the Brazilian bishops' conference in April. The March instruction was widely welcomed by Latin American liberation theologians as indicating a far more positive tone than the first Instruction of August 1984. Still, as Leonardo Boff told me, "it did not capture the deepest intuition of liberation theology" and was written more from a European point of view.

Pope John Paul's letter, written following a March meeting with the leadership of the Brazilian bishops' conference, is seen in an entirely different light. For Boff, it takes "a step beyond Ratzinger . . . It was very prophetic, very pastoral, and a great support. It says something you come across nowhere else, that liberation theology is not only useful and opportune but also necessary . . . The pope gives a kind of mandate to the Brazilian church to create the conditions for elaborating an effective theology against injustice, not only for Brazil, but for all the Latin American sub-continent, and for other countries in similar (socio-economic) situations."

THE IMPACT of the pope's letter on the Brazilian church can only be fully appreciated when it is realized that many bishops there held genuine fears that their conference was going to be intervened by Rome, its elected leadership deposed, and a more conservative leadership put in its place. Bishop Mauro Morelli of the diocese of Duque de Caxias and Sao Joao de Meriti on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro explained to me that for some years "a small group of Brazilian bishops in partnership with a group in Rome have been trying to change the course of the church in Brazil. There have been so many letters to Rome, so many denunciations against many of us. It's all part of a long process, trying to keep the relationship with Rome tense and have the Holy See intervene here.

"Boff's punishment has, for me, to be placed within this long fight between those who believe the faith is in danger, the church is running away from its spiritual mission and will be destroyed, and those of us who believe that faith is more alive today, love for the church is stronger, and participation is greater than ever before." For Bishop Morelli, the pope's letter "opened a new moment. I think that the more conservative were defeated, at least for the moment. Those of us who are more open and, though I don't like to use the word, more progressive, are gaining control of the situation, especially in terms of our relationship to Rome."

The visits of Cardinals Hamer and Simonis, therefore, which just a few months previous would have been seen by progressives in an ominous light, were regarded as opportunities to further introduce key European churchmen to the reality of church life in Latin America. As if to confirm the existence

PEADAR KIRBY *is an Irish Journalist currently working with* Noticias Aliadas/Latinamerica Press *in Lima, Peru. He recently spent a month in Brazil.*

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of a new mood in Rome, Cardinal Hamer brought with him a letter from the pope to Brazil's conference of religious, repeating the warm tone of the previous papal letter to the bishops' conference. Furthermore, Cardinal Hamer was the guest of the controversial president of the bishops' conference, Bishop Ivo Lorscheiter, whose diocese of Santa Maria in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul he visited. Both are close personal friends since they were students together in Rome.

Cardinal Simonis was hosted by a Brazilian family who had promised "to introduce him to both sides." From what Bishop Morelli and Father Boff told me, both of whom had long conversations with the Dutch cardinal, the highlight of the visit for him was attendance at the sixth national meeting of base Christian communities. Leonardo Boff, who attended the same meeting, said that Cardinal Simonis wept with joy to see poor Christians sharing their faith so openly in the presence of over fifty bishops. "He said he understood now that liberation theology springs from faith and the terrible suffering that Brazilian people are going through," Bishop Morelli said.

THE desperate poverty of Peru seems to have had a similar impact on Cardinal Ratzinger. He visited the huge shanty town of Villa El Salvador on the outskirts of Lima where the pope had had a highly emotional meeting with an estimated two million slumdwellers during his Peruvian visit in February 1985. The cardinal got an opportunity the pope never had. He walked the sandy, unpaved streets among the people's simple homes made from reed matting.

Again I have it from an eyewitness that Ratzinger, too, shed tears when he was taken to visit a poor woman in her hut who, despite having cancer and having lost her husband in a road accident recently, still leads a group of family catechists who come to gather around her bed once a week. The cardinal also met with the sixty members of the shantytown's pastoral team during which some members spoke openly of their attempts to build "a church of the poor." One U.S. missionary priest told the cardinal that he had come "as do so many U.S., Irish, or German missionaries" thinking he had so much to tell the people, only to find that the people evangelized him. (The reference to the cardinal's German nationality was not lost on those present.)

A letter from the pope brought by Cardinal Ratzinger expressed hope for "a continuation of the fraternal ecclesial dialogue begun during recent *ad limina* visits in order to analyze and deepen together certain themes of common interest." The one such theme mentioned by name was liberation theology. The tone of the letter appears a marked change from the pressure on the Peruvian bishops' conference throughout 1983 and 1984 to reach agreement on a statement on liberation theology which was finally issued only when all Peru's bishops were summoned to Rome in October 1984. A second papal letter in July strongly commended the stance taken by the Peruvian bishops after the June 19 massacre of some 250 prisoners by troops in Lima.

Perhaps more significant than the two lengthy and highly theoretical public talks given by Cardinal Ratzinger in Lima (one on the ecclesiology of Vatican II and the other on the second Vatican Instruction on liberation theology), was his statement that there are now no processes pending in his congregation against liberation theologians. The prestigious Lima bi-monthly *Que Hacer,* which is close to progressive church sectors, summed up the visit by saying:

> Those who wished to "open Ratzinger's eyes," those church sectors which surrounded him all the time (much to the annoyance of some), are undoubtedly feeling let down at having their constant nostalgia for condemnations unfulfilled. It seems obvious that the German cardinal was infinitely more shrewd than they in seeing the true problems of the country and the Peruvian church. It seems then, that the pretended "orthodoxy" of these sectors is much closer to the pre-conciliar and conservative Lefevbre than to the ecclesial and theological outlook of the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Behind these words can be sensed the sigh of relief felt that Cardinal Ratzinger said or did nothing during his visit that could be taken as lending support to the militantly conservative wing of the Peruvian church. Unlike the situation in Brazil, where liberation theologians can count on the support of their bishops' conference, Peru's bishops are deeply divided on the subject.

ON THE EVE of the Ratzinger visit, Father Gustavo Gutierrez published his first book directly commenting on the liberation theology debate, *La verdad los hara libres (The Truth Will Make You Free).* Significantly his two previous books — *Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente* (*Speaking of God from the Suffering of the Innocent*) and *Drink from Your Own Wells* -- dealt with spiritual themes.

As Bishop Morelli put it, the big question now is how much the pope's more favorable words on liberation theology will be translated into practice. Already theologians are chaffing at Cardinal Ratzinger's blocking of a major compendium of theology in fifty-four volumes being produced by over 100 liberation theologians with the support of 115 bishops.

The first three volumes have appeared and a further five are ready for publication. But Cardinal Ratzinger has blocked their release until he is given "supplementary guarantees of orthodoxy," says Leonardo Boff. At the moment the situation is at an impasse with the Vatican demanding that the conservative Latin American bishops' conference (CELAM) be allowed to appoint three bishops to join three bishops named by the Brazilian bishops' conference and one named by the Vatican to overview the collection's publication.

Whatever the outcome of disputes like this, it does seem clear that a new era has opened for liberation theology. Though heartily disagreeing with my compatriot, Conor Cruise O'Brien, who argued in the August 1986 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* that the pope has effectively been defeated in his attempt to stamp out Latin America's new faith in the *"Dios de los pobres"* and has instead decided to join what he could not defeat, there does seem to be a new sympathy, at least in

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certain sectors of the Vatican, for this theology and the new model of church emerging under its inspiration. While the controversy is far from over, it can reasonably be hoped that it has become a dialogue between two positions that basically understand one another, rather than a full-scale Vatican offensive on something more feared than understood.

Screen

BAD HABITS

'ROSE' & 'TOUGH GUYS'

THE NAME OF THE ROSE combines skillful cinematic technique, fine acting, intellectual pretension, and sheer depravity. The technique belongs to Jean Jacques Annaud, who formerly made *Quest for Fire*, and who here provides some entertaining, camp sequences based on Umberto Eco's thriller set in an Italian Benedictine Abbey in 1327. The acting laurels belong mostly to Sean Connery as Eco's hero William of Baskerville, the visiting Franciscan scholar who turns sleuth and braves the wrath of the Inquisition. Connery is not just James Bond in cowl and sandals; as his name indicates, he is also a genuine Sherlock and plays his role with deadpan wit and convincing charm.

But Connery has a second, more limiting archetype to inhabit — that of the Englishman, who, as in all Gothic mysteries since the 1790s, must try to inject some rationality, health, and humor into a world of crazed (here, fanatically religious) Italians. Eco provided the raw materials for a literal *Gothic*, way back when, a fact which Annaud never tires of repeating as his camera devours the abbey as the ultimate haunted house. I know Eco's book only at second hand, and may be mistaken in assuming that he provided Annaud with the caricatures of medieval Catholicism that seem basic to the plot. What Annaud seems to have lost, or discarded, is the genuine treatment of serious cultural and religious issues that dignified Eco's horror. In the film, ideas are trifled with, only to be discarded like toys when the primary purposes of cruelty and caricature have been satisfied.

Annaud's hand is tipped when Connery and his ward, Aldo of Metz (Christian Slater) first enter the abbey: all the monks have been taken from central casting at *Planet of the Apes*, with bulging eyes only the most obvious of their gargoyle features. A toothless hunchback shows up on cue, then a fruitcake "mystic" (played by William Hickey, who repeats his hammy Italian from *Prizzi's Honor*, perhaps assuming that Annaud would appreciate the equation of monks and Mafia). There are appropriately dark hints of perverse sexuality, flagellation, necrophilia, and other predictable paraphernalia of modern rationalist myth. Indeed, at times I thought that I had accidentally wandered back into *Agnes of God*, last year's entry in the genre, as Connery, exactly like Jane Fonda, starts to search the catacomb-like passages of the abbey (surrounded by scores of skulls).

Some of Annaud's images of the Middle Ages are so farcical they resemble Monty Python's *Jabberwocky* and *The Search for the Holy Grail*. But Annaud lacks their satirical honesty. He also lacks the genuine curiosity of Bergman, who, rationalist though he is, appreciates mystery (is there a finer moment in religious film than Death's sad confession in *The Seventh Seal* that even he does not know about the afterlife?) Although the key issue in the plot involves the survival of Aristotle's manuscript on comedy, the reputed, missing second part of the *Poetics*, Annaud presents its significance in a garbled fashion, and never fully explores the rich tension of comedy and faith, or the importance of comedy to the faith of William of Baskerville. Given similar short shrift are William's guilt over his past role in the Inquisition, and an interesting debate with modern echoes, Christ's attitude to wealth. Annaud presents this debate comically, as a shouting match between Franciscans and papal legates seemingly engaged in the verbal trifle, "Did Christ own his own garment or not?"

Behind the travesty of *The Name of the Rose* is the Whig interpretation of history, the notion of the centuries as one continuous ascent up to modern enlightenment. As a result, it never engages the thought of the past; William's enemies seem simply reactionary villains. Feodor Chaliapin, Jr., as an elder Benedictine, almost transcends the caricature when he pronounces with fervor, "There is no progress in knowledge, only a sublime recapitulation of what is already known." It is easy to attack this, and easy to identify the mistakes that have plagued church history because of it. A harder task is to discern what possible grains of truth such an attitude might embody. For a moment, Chaliapin made this possible simply by tone of voice. But the harum-scarum plot quickly undoes his effort at openmindedness about closemindedness.

F. Murray Abraham is similarly straitjacketed as a sadistic Inquisitor. With typical technical proficiency Annaud prepares us for his entry with a scary buildup. But when Abraham arrives in the last half of the film, no vital drama develops between him and Connery, but simply a lame contest between superstition and reason, with all nuances eliminated. Abraham mugs well but his role is dramatically inert.

Movie critics have often noted the sly ambivalence of religious epics like *The Ten Commandments*, where De Mille combined prurience and moralism: viewers were treated to a lush spectacle of sin, only to be reminded, quite late in such films, how much the naughty were punished. Annaud does a De Mille in reverse: he lasciviates in the cruelty of the Catholic Middle Ages, then pretends he wants us to condemn the spectacle. But his vision makes serial murder, vivisection, impaling, burning at the stake, and disemboweling the center of the *Name of the Rose* for a simple reason. He seems to like them.

TOUGH GUYS wastes the still considerable talents of Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster. The idea of casting the two together again is good and their teamwork at times evokes

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ghosts of old collaborations like *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, The List of Adrian Messenger, The Devil's Disciple,* and *Seven Days in May*. In *Tough Guys* they are up to their roles as old-time crooks who have just ended thirty-year jail sentences for a 1955 train robbery and who can't resist one last stab at a spectacular crime. To watch Lancaster walk with his awkward ramrod dignity, or resolutely threaten Douglas with "another hole in his chin" when they argue over the new caper, provides genuine small treats. But small treats are all that *Tough Guys* delivers.

The fault lies not with the actors, or even the basic plot, which has them hijacking the same train, the "Gold Coast Flyer" which they originally robbed in 1955, and which they lust after again when hauled out for a sentimental nostalgic run. From similar materials, Phillip Borsos made the evocative 1983 mini-hit *The Grey Fox,* where Richard Farnsworth played a stagecoach robber who tackled a train as a last hurrah. The fault lies with a screenplay and directing (by Jeff Kanew) that settles for petty jokes about changes since the fifties and rarely penetrates the pathos implicit in the characters, their longing for a stab at glory in a world which has passed them by.

Tough Guys has two strong voices but ends up mostly with empty echoes. The ending, with an evasive freeze-frame borrowed from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,* is particularly disappointing. With its references to the difficulty of aging in a youth-oriented world, *Tough Guys* also copies from *Cocoon* and television's *The Golden Girls*. Unfortunately the obvious, demographically calculated appeal in the film to those at least over thirty-five is not matched with maturity in tone. As the careers of Lancaster and Douglas suggest, Hollywood just doesn't make them like they used to.

TOM O'BRIEN

Anne Porter

A Night in Ireland

Our steamship docked at night
In Cobh, an Irish seaport
A small one in those days

Not an inn, not a tavern was open
And we had to wait till morning
For the train to Fermoy

But in the wooded hills
Up above the town
Nightingales were awake
All the dark thickets
Were rich with their songs

It was in those woods
And on that night
I dreamed that I found the door
Of all doors the most hidden
And most renowned

Overgrown with nettles
Rustic and low
Built as if for children
Or as a gate for sheep
In some back-country pasture

And through a chink in the door
I saw the marvelous light
That's purest of all lights
Neither sun nor moon
Nor any star I know of
Could give such light

And by this light
I saw the crowds of the blessed
From the greatest to the smallest
The smallest were running and laughing
And Christ the Lord was with them
And also Mary

But before I could knock at the door
Someone spoke to me
I think it was an angel

He said You've come too soon
Go back into the towns
Live there as love's apprentice
And God will give you his kingdom

I woke up just before sunrise
When the nightingales ended their songs
Dew gathered on the ferns
And the cool woods
Gave off a scent of earth
In the early morning

I was hungry and cold
And I started back to the town
At the first signs of day

Already a sunlit smoke
Was rising from the chimneys
And mist from the water

I heard a rooster crowing
And then I heard the whistle
Of the train to Fermoy.

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ELIE WIESEL ON THE WRITER'S CRAFT

Messenger for the ten thousandth

HARRY JAMES CARGAS

*ELIE WIESEL, who has just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, – was recently interviewed in a program at The Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum at Claremont McKenna College in California by Harry James Cargas.The director of the Athenaeum, Professor John Roth, who himself has published a book on Wiesel (*A Consuming Fire, *John Knox Press) arranged the dialogue, which covered a wide range of subject matter. What follows deals with Wiesel as author:*

CARGAS: J.W.N. Sullivan has written a well respected biography of Beethoven which says that the composer would not have been the great musical force he is without having suffered as he did. Does the same apply to you?

WIESEL: Maybe it is impossible to create without pain. A French poet, Alfred de Musset, said that every man is a child; pain is his teacher. It is impossible to write out of happiness. You can pray with happiness, but then that prayer itself — because you feel the need to pray — involves a pain which may not be yours; it invokes the pain that is not there. What is a prayer of this kind? It is a prayer of gratitude saying, "Thank you, God, for not giving me pain." Yet in saying so, the pain is there. If not, you would not be able to conjure it.

So, yes, literature and pain are inherently linked to one another, intrinsically part of one another. However, had I not gone through certain experiences, I would have written, but other things. I would have written religious material; I would have written a commentary on the Bible, which I had done anyway, before the war. I would have written commentaries on the Talmud; I would have remained in the totally religious domain. But never would I have written a novel, or essays of these kinds: for human rights or for the sake of other victims. Pain is essential. Often I cannot avoid it. Therefore all one can do is redeem it; and the only way to redeem it is through literature, art, poetry, music.

CARGAS: Can you by doing this, in some way help redeem the pain of others?

WIESEL: "Redeem the pain of others" is too presumptuous for me to say. But what I would like to do is to shed light on the pain of others. Since I rarely speak about my own pain, except in my first book *Night,* I would like to speak about people I don't even know, who are suffering. All those prisoners in their prisons; all those old people in their old-age homes; the hungry; the Colombian earthquake victims in the mud. Because we are dealing with literature, we have a certain imagination; we try to imagine their pain. So I am taking the torchlight and am turning it to their tale. Can my pain prevent them from suffering? I wish it could. But it cannot. Everyone, in his or her own destiny, has a certain relationship with pain. We must curtail it, as best we can. Or at least we must say: that person suffers unjustly; all suffering is unjust.

CARGAS: Let's talk a little about your routine. Do you try to write daily a certain amount of time or a certain amount of words?

WIESEL: Writing should not be routine; writing should actually be the opposite of procedural because [otherwise] the written word would become a routine word. However, there is a discipline. I still write my books first of all in longhand, which I know is anachronistic to many. Then, when I have my manuscript finished, more or less, I type it myself, with two fingers. I type fast with two fingers. And then when it's ready, I reread, recorrect, and retype it. Everything is my own work. I do not give it to secretaries or to typists.

Usually I get up early every morning and from 6:00 to 10:00 I write. The rest of the time I study and prepare my work or I do other things. But four hours a day are exclusively devoted to writing. Often it's not good. Very often I don't keep one page

HARRY JAMES CARGAS, *a professor at Webster University in St. Louis, counts among his twenty-three books, one titled* Harry James Cargas in Conversation with Elie Wiesel.

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of these four hours of fiction. Nevertheless, the next day I come back, take back a page and write it again, twenty times, thirty times. The methods vary. At times, I keep a page. If I feel it doesn't move, I keep the page and write it again and again and again. I am not exaggerating; I could write the same page thirty, forty times. And the fortieth time, all of a sudden I feel the block is removed and I continue. And if not, I will do it forty-one times. There are other occasions — mainly non-fiction, essays — when if I feel there is a block, I continue nevertheless because I have to develop the idea. I say to myself I will come back to it when I finish the whole book.

CARGAS: Do you spend all four hours writing or is some of the time creating mentally?

WIESEL: Same thing, creating mentally and writing. I think while writing, and I listen to music when I write. I need the musical background. Classical music. I'm behind the times. I'm still with Baroque music, Gregorian chant, the requiems, and with the quartets of Beethoven and Brahms. That is what I need for the climate, for the surroundings, for the landscape: the music. And when I write, if *it's* there — we call it the ***shekinah*** (the presence of God) — the shekinah is on your fingers, or on your lips, inspiration is there and there is no problem.

CARGAS: When do you fit in the book reviews or an article for the *New York Times?* Is that a part of these four hours?

WIESEL: Oh no, it's separate. The four hours are mainly fiction. The non-fiction is later on. For the non-fiction I need a lot of research. For my book on the Bible, or the Talmud or Hassidism, there's a lot of research. It's difficult to jump up, to find the proper book, proper text or source, then copy it and analyze it. When you write fiction you cannot do that; you must stay in one place. The only time I get up is to change the record on the record player. But non-fiction is afterwards. I work a lot, some sixteen hours a day.

CARGAS: Something that intrigues me about you which has not been explored is this: when you were a student at the Sorbonne you spent a year in India in absolute silence. Would you care to discuss the kind of impact which that year had on you?

WIESEL: The impact came before. I wanted to write a comparative study on asceticism, meaning "voluntary suffering." For obvious reasons. I belong to a tradition, to a people, to a time, that was haunted by suffering. So I wanted to go to the end of that mystery: What is the mystery of suffering? My idea was to write a comparative study of the subject in Judaism, in Christianity, and Buddhism. At that time it was easy for me to travel because I was extremely poor. I was working as a journalist for an Israeli paper in Paris, and my salary at the highest was fifty dollars a month. At the end of the month I always had palpitations; I didn't know how to pay my rent. Even after the war, I was often hungry. But that's part of the romantic condition of a student. To be a student in Paris and not be hungry is wrong. So I had my share of hunger.

I DECIDED to go to India, because as a journalist I could get free passage on certain ships and planes and I got a free passage to India. There I felt at home because I knew the Indian culture very well; that is why I wanted to go there. This was a time when I used to know much of the Upanishads and the Vedas and the Gitas almost by heart. I cannot tell you the attachment I felt to those texts. They are sacred texts, beautiful texts, mystical texts in their splendor. I felt I would go there and I would love it. In the beginning it was true; I loved my being there. The problem was to travel in India. I didn't have money. But one day I met, in a hotel, together with a diplomat friend of mine, a man to whom I was introduced as a young student from Paris. This Indian was a Parsee — of a special caste, the most successful caste in India. We spoke and he couldn't understand how a European would know so much about Indian mysticism. When I told him that I was a Jew, on top of that, he was totally flabbergasted. How could a Jew understand so much about Indian mysticism? So I explained to him the sources we had in common, that all mystical traditions have really the same source. Religions are separate but mysticism is always uniting. As I talked to him and explained to him, he became friendly and then he gave me a special card. He said, "I know you are a student and you are poor, and so forth, and you have to go around India. I am the owner of Air India. Whenever you need to go somewhere, take a plane on this card." Which I did. And not only that: whenever I was hungry, I took a plane. I went around India, from ashram to ashram. I met many people and I studied their customs.

Then, honestly, I realized that I will never understand India. I come from a tradition which is so different that I could never be a Hindu; I could never be a Buddhist, because they are so different. I am not judging, I hope you understand. I am too much in awe of every religious tradition, especially of those which to us Jews did not mean suffering but esoteric experiences. We never suffered because of Buddhists. So I was much in awe of that tradition, yet I felt it was not for me.

I'll tell you why. At one point I was walking with people in Calcutta. You know India is so poor, people are in the streets in the hundreds, in the thousands. Countless are crippled and they move on their little wheelchairs which they themselves fabricate; the whole thing is like a nightmare. Yet, when I walked with somebody there who was a German, he didn't even see the suffering; he was so accustomed to it. And there is the Indian philosophy where suffering is not something bad, because it helps the soul ascend to a higher degree; I couldn't take that. The indifference to suffering is something that I could not tolerate. Therefore, after awhile, I left. And I came to the conclusion that I am free to choose my own suffering. But I am not free to consent to someone else's suffering. Therefore, I left India. I still love to teach the Indian texts occasionally, and surely I read them, but I am no longer as infatuated with them as I used to be then, for this specific reason.

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CARGAS: Does your writing in some way help you to purge your pain?

WIESEL: You know I don't speak about my pain. My pain is something that doesn't need to be purged. I want to prevent people from suffering. I don't speak about my suffering. Suffering is something personal and discreet. Also, I know it will never leave me. I don't want it to leave me. It would be a betrayal. How can I leave that pain? All I can try to do is to make something out of that pain, to find a meaning to it and share that meaning. But not share the pain. If, as a result of my writing, you share my pain, then I would fail. I don't want you to have pain. I want you to get the *meaning* of the pain, not the pain.

CARGAS: You chose not to write for a long period of time after the Auschwitz experience. What caused you finally to decide that you would write?

C. W. Pratt

On the Beauty of the Universal Order

Odd
to think that God
designed
the apple tree
so perfectly
to catch on crooked branch, in acute crotch,
the narrow pointed ladder Adam would invent
to ease his labor when as punishment
for apple-snatching, he was sent
forth wandering from the garden. And odd that I,
without design,
at least of mine,
now at the end of almost fifty years should find
myself here high
on springy rungs, the ladder like an arrow pointing me
towards dangling planets. I grasp a branch and lean
over the void to grip
the perfect apple at a branch's tip.

Brown
below my feet, turned earth tells where
this morning I clawed down
ladderless to find
and fumble up to air,
knobby and bare
as baby skulls, huge as pre-Edenic continents,
my Kennebecs:
earth-apples. One,
under my hand,
stirred, shook off a clod,
became bloat toad.
Also child of God.

WIESEL: I knew I would write after ten years. That [Auschwitz] was in 1945. When the ten years were up, by coincidence, I met François Mauriac who was so helpful to me. But why I decided not to write [earlier] is simply because I was suspicious of words. I still am. Byalic, a Hebrew poet, said, "Words are like prostitutes; they give themselves to anyone." And I didn't want to be used, or to use, or to misuse, or to be misused by words. I felt ten years is a mystical number, so I wanted to wait for ten years.

CARGAS: Irving Halperin, who teaches at San Francisco State University, wrote a book entitled, *Messengers from the Dead,* a volume of criticism about Holocaust literature. There's a chapter devoted to your work, as you know. Do you want to say something about the responsibility that you have taken on as a messenger?

WIESEL: Not only I, but everyone who was there, sooner or later, to a certain degree, feels that he or she was a messenger sent back. Why? I'll give you a practical example. Those of you who read *Night* may remember that the last week in Buchenwald was a difficult, despairing, senseless, absurd week. The Americans were coming closer, so the Germans decided to evacuate the camp. There were 80,000 in the camp and they were going to evacuate 10,000 every day. In the beginning, they started with the Jews, and then everybody. Most of those who left were killed, either on the way, or on the trains: starved or shot. To leave meant death.

FOR some reason that had nothing to do with me because I am not a courageous person, I am not a person of initiative, I lived. I have never done anything to stay alive. I am not the type. I am not a sportsman. I am not strong. Logically, I should have been the first to die because I was always sick when I was a child. And I was always afraid of beatings. I didn't do anything. But really by chance . . . I'm not saying by miracle because if I were to say miracle that would mean that God performed a miracle for me and chose not to perform miracles for so many others, so I refuse the word miracle in this context. By chance, I always happened to be in the eleven thousandth. Sometimes I was maybe thirty to forty people away from the gate. Waiting for the gate. The gate was open, people were going. But they had to let out only 10,000, then they'd stop. And I'm very often haunted by the person who was the ten thousandth. And if I had been the ten thousandth, maybe he would be sitting here in my place.

So who is that ten thousandth? This is really what I feel: since I can't bring him back, I must try to speak for him. I cannot speak for all. I have no right to speak for all. No one has the right to speak for all. But for that unique young man, whom I don't know, never knew, who simply left because he happened to be there. If somebody had pushed me forward, I would have run forward and I would have been the ten thousandth. In this sense, I accept the term messenger. That means that I choose to be his messenger because he, I hope, now is my messenger.

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Books: LANGUAGE OF 'FACT' — & OF LOVE

THE CAPITALIST REVOLUTION

FIFTY PROPOSITIONS ABOUT PROSPERITY, EQUALITY, AND LIBERTY

Peter L. Berger
Basic Books, $17.95, 272 pp.

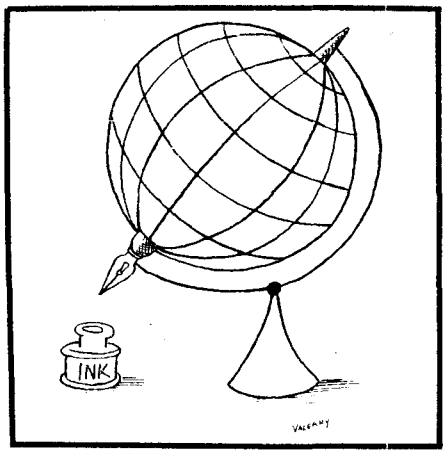
Michael Harrington

TO MY surprise, I read Peter Berger's new book in a constant state of irritation punctuated by occasional gusts of anger. I was, of course, perfectly aware at the outset that Berger is a thinker who has moved from the center to the neo-conservative right. Still, I had been impressed by the seriousness of his work, by studies which came after that transition, like *The Heretical Imperative*, as well as those which came before, like the fascinating *Social Construction of Reality* (with Thomas Luckmann).

So I looked forward to an interesting challenge to my own ideas and if I did not prepare myself for conversion to Reaganism, I still anticipated something more solid than the usual neo-con fluff. Instead I got non-stop irritation.

What bothered me was not the politics of *The Capitalist Revolution* but its tone of voice and the methodological assumptions which justified it. This is an utterly partisan tract pretending to be a humble, "value free" translation of the "empirical" evidence into hard-headed conclusions. There is a considerable amount of intellectual harrumphing, mainly to show that no moral, or other, prejudices are allowed to intrude. "Is South Africa a democracy today?" Berger asks at one point. And comments: "Rather than *define* democracy in terms of some standard of universal adult suffrage, I think it more useful to omit this matter from the definition and *then* to explore the range of democratic participation and its consequences as an empirical issue."

Strangely, it is precisely the definitional approach which Berger so rigorously eschews here — in the case of South Africa! — that is the basic method



of his entire book. Not so strangely, it turns out that the empirical reality which this method discloses is impeccably conservative. Indeed, the conclusions of the book might be summarized as Fifty Propositions about Capitalism Good, Socialism Bad. Berger is merely the medium for this empirical message and has, he tells us, "no a priori principles to proclaim." Quite so. He does not proclaim his principles, he merely practices them.

I will pass over the vulgarizations and simplifications of Marx that ensue, a brief summary, for instance, of the labor theory of value which has nothing to do with it, and an account of Marx's analysis of the relationship between money and individualism which is the exact opposite of the one he held. One gets used to that sort of thing and it is worth only a sigh, not a rage. It is the fundamentally flawed, and even deceptive, methodology which got to me.

Berger defines capitalism as a market economy and socialism as a command (on the Soviet model) economy. He then "empirically" surveys the very selective evidence yielded by such a preconception and concludes — without a single value judgment, of course — that all democracies are capitalist (though not all capitalisms are democratic) and all socialisms dictatorships. It also follows "empirically" that capitalism is more productive, has greater personal freedom

(Continued on page 568)

THE LOST LANGUAGE OF CRANES

David Leavitt
Knopf, $17.95, 319 pp.

Robert Jones

EACH of us in our own way lives on the outside. And each of us imagines that somewhere exists a central core to experience, a kind of perfect middle ground, from which we have been cast out. Even the least militant among us share a desire to be less inarticulate with the culture at large and to have it known how life is lived outside its boundaries. Often the myths of the dominant culture fail us because they speak to the very experience from which we believe ourselves to be exiled. And so we look to the books we read to find a public voice that will elevate our private narratives into a shared experience. Literature presupposes this dream of a common language, the hope that we may find in someone else's story a truth to lay claim to, and to which we may point as a myth of origin and say: that is how it was.

In *Family Dancing* (Warner Books, 1984), his first collection of short stories published two years ago, David Leavitt gave sympathetic voice to a variety of characters who found themselves surprised and set adrift by ordinary life: a mother dying of cancer and afraid of abandoning her two children; a woman whose daughter believes she was born in outer space; an ugly girl trying to win her father's love; and several young men coming of age as they come to terms with their homosexuality. In these stories, Leavitt seemed obsessed with mothers and revealed a disquieting talent for evoking the betrayals their lives have brought them: betrayals by husbands and children, by age and their own bodies.

If these stories could be said to have a unifying theme, it is that those events that make us most human — disease, despair, shame, sexual difference — render us most alone. From the terminally ill

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woman who stares across the kitchen at the dwarf girl in "Counting Months," to the woman who drives herself to cancer treatments in "Radiation," to the woman who tries to recall the child she raised in the son who brings his male lover home in "Territory," Leavitt's stories are distinguished by an ability to describe our separateness and alienation in ways that never fall victim to a more paralyzing kind of pessimism. As the epigraph to *Family Dancing*, Leavitt chose Marianne Moore's poem, "Elephants." His writing shares the poem's suggestion of resilience, the sense of reconciliation to being life's prisoner. As Moore says at the end of the end of the poem, ". . . when what we hoped for came to nothing, we revived."

What concerned Leavitt in his short stories was the desire to find a language that describes the isolate worlds we inhabit. A year after the accident that almost killed them, the narrator in the story "Alien" continues to visit her mute, invalid husband. As she sits in the hospital room, she thinks:

> If I could reach you, Alden, in the world behind your eyes, I'd ask you a question: Why did you turn off the road? Was it whim, the sudden temptation of destroying both of us for no reason? Or did you hope the car would bear wings and engines, take off into the atmosphere, and propel you — us — in a split second out of the world?

It is this compulsion to understand without rancor that makes many of Leavitt's characters memorable. And it is his lack of embarrassment at charting the unfashionable complexities of human kindness and love that gives his writing its freshness. For his characters, what is perpetually lost is a language that articulates the presence of our individual tragedies against the carelessness of everyday life. And it is the silence that results from this loss and the desire to speak through the distances between us that are at the heart of human experience.

But the limitations of Leavitt's vision derive from this same attempt to express the feeling of being cut off from life. His empathy for the driftlessness of disappointed mothers does not extend to the subject that is closest to his heart: what it means to be a homosexual finding his place in the world. Too often Leavitt assumes that the idea central to his stories — a young man confronting his family with his first lover — is sufficient to justify his narrative. There is nothing threatening about his characters or the lives they lead. They have the same dream of affluence, the same hope for permanent love as we find in any suburban romance.

This is not to say that these desires are a heterosexual domain. But Leavitt's obsession with mothers in this regard interferes with his freedom as a writer. He solicits approval for his sexual difference by selling out to the same dreams of young professionals everywhere. He wants to explain what it has meant for him to be a homosexual, but he seems also to want an imagined audience of mothers to think him a good boy. These two impulses are at odds in his work and limit his writing at the very moment it should be its least self-conscious. And this imaginative reticence diminishes the considerable achievement of his first novel, *The Lost Language of Cranes*.

In the story of Owen Benjamin and his son, Philip, Leavitt has chosen an unfortunate narrative line. Owen is a man with an unremarkable career who finds himself overtaken by a secret life. For years he has spent Sunday afternoons engaging in furtive sex in homosexual movie theaters. The pressures of guilt and desire begin to unsettle the uneasy truce Owen has made with his secret just when Philip announces his own homosexuality to his parents. Caught between Owen's lies and Philip's relentless demands for approval is Rose Benjamin, their wife and mother. She is meant to assuage her husband's anguish and her son's insecurities as she finds herself sinking beneath a life she is increasingly unable to understand.

The parallel stories of father and son lead easily to caricature. The reader knows from the first scene that the novel will move towards a denouement in which father and son acknowledge each other's homosexuality. But the events leading to this moment too seldom surprise us. Owen's torture is unfortunately typical of someone of his generation and his story, however painful, is a cliché. And Philip has no characteristics to distinguish him other than his sexuality. In itself, Philip's sexuality remains a revelation for Leavitt, but for us it is too insubstantial to fully engage our attention.

In this regard, Leavitt falls victim to an adolescent self-importance that assumes everything he feels means something unique to the world. What saves Philip's story is Leavitt's guilelessness as a writer. The reader would have to be a monster to sneer at the heartfelt descriptions of Philip's hopelessness in love. But Leavitt relies too easily on our sympathy as human beings to carry us through the gaps in his narrative. One wonders what point he intended to make in contrasting Owen's closeted, fearful sexuality with Philip's less inhibited, more benign acceptance of his nature. We do not need a novel to tell us that society has changed these past twenty years.

This is not to suggest that novels about homosexuals demand the sexual outlaw toughness of writers like John Rechy. But in the books like Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, or in some of the writing of James Purdy, we witness a form of desire that tells us something about love that is at once alien and revelatory. In a few paragraphs, Holleran is able to turn Manhattan at dawn into a foreign territory. For the time we are reading, it becomes a place owned by his characters in ways that make us believe we have never walked the same streets. And when he writes of coming to town and how he "stayed and time ceased even to be measured, nothing was measured, except the cyclical process of love," we get a glimpse of a life wasted and abandoned to desire.

Writers like Holleran and Purdy understand the subversiveness that is one part of homosexual love, the after-hours when the city becomes a world apart from the daylight. Leavitt never strays far enough from home to imagine this other reality. And so, ironically, his novel never takes flight in the moments when he writes about the sexualty that preoccupies him. But he has created something remarkable in *The Lost Language of Cranes* and she is found, similar to the figures of the mothers who distin-

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guish his short stories, in the character of Rose.

When Philip announces his homosexuality to his parents, Rose replies: "There are things I could tell you. Things I've never told a living soul. . . . I don't believe that just because something's a secret, it therefore has to be revealed." In their arrogance of wanting everything to be known, Owen and Philip invade Rose's sense that the necessary progress of life is built upon acceding to some necessary illusions. She denies as long as possible the clues to Owen's homosexuality because she knows that this one, irrevocable revelation will subvert the entire structure of her past:

> Now it seemed to her ironic that she should have seen in Owen's face assurance, a sign that she was making the right decision, when in fact she was making the first and largest of a series of mistakes that would carry her out into her life like an undertow, then cease, leaving her stranded, fifty-two years old, with nothing to look back on but a chain of wrong decisions, carefully made.

Owen's confession forces Rose to realize that she has misunderstood the past twenty years. When he whispered, "Save me," in their youth, it was not for any belief in the redemptive power of love, but because he needed a cover for his fear. Now that Owen has spoken, Rose loses everything she knows.

As the central motif to his novel, Leavitt reimagines the case study of the crane-child, a boy abandoned by his mother in an apartment near a construction site. Bereft of human contact, the child identified only with the cranes outside his window. He screeched and moved in imitation of them. And when he was out of their sight, he became silent. The sound of the cranes was the only language he could speak.

The crane-child is a parable of the way the imagination seizes upon an object to love. The screeches of the crane-child signify a lost language to Leavitt because their particular magic is incommunicable to anyone else but the boy. The language can be expressed only in the naturalness and irrationality of desire. Leavitt intends the image to imply the common truth that homosexuality is no different from its opposite. We are chosen by our desire in the same way the child chose the cranes. Each is part of the mysterious coming-together that is the nature of love.

In describing the crane-child, Leavitt writes:

> How wondrous, how grand those cranes must have seemed . . . compared to the small and clumsy creatures who surrounded him. For each, in his own way . . . finds what it is he must love, and loves it; the window becomes a mirror; whatever it is that we love, that is who we are.

His novel attempts to give voice to the lost languages that inexorably pull Owen and Philip towards the men they love. Yet it is Rose, not Owen or Philip, who mirrors most perfectly the crane-child. She understands how those we love become part of us. What is finally haunting about *The Lost Language of Cranes* is not the sexual frenzy of father and son, but the echoes of the more subtle language of love that Rose attempts to retrieve from their lives.

Andrew Greeley, this is my life!

CONFESSIONS OF A PARISH PRIEST
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Andrew M. Greeley
Simon and Schuster, $18.95, 507 pp.

John Deedy

COLOR him anything, but don't color him boring — Andrew Greeley, that is. Greeley's sociology might be cold and wearying (it's the nature of the science, really), but it braved new ground; though its methodology and interpretation have been contested, new insights were there. If nothing more, he forced American Catholicism to take seriously a science it had once disdained. His novels are flawed, indeed flayed by some critics, but they're devoured by millions who ask of a story that it be foremost a good read. (Senator Pat Moynihan — the familiarity is on that level — is cited as saying the novels are "bringing millions back to the church," and Ken Prewitt of the Social Science Research Council as saying they're so imbued with sociology that he can dispense himself from Greeley's technical works. But then old friends are often given to hyperbole.) The syndicated columns have been discontinued, but articles, commentaries, and books of nonfiction still flow steadily from mind, pen, and word processor, and if they sometimes seem hurried and ill-tempered, they're invariably challenging. Andrew Greeley is no one's fool — and, again, no one's bore.

Confessions of a Parish Priest, accordingly, is precisely what one would expect a Greeley autobiography to be: vintage stuff. Opinionated, combative, exasperating, outrageous, then warm, charming, generous, persuasive, Andrew Greeley is a man uneasy to peg, and of course impossible to ignore. Like him or not, he is one of the large figures of our place and time, and history will be taking him into account long after it has forgotten many of more exalted rank with whom he has tilted lances, like the late cardinal-archbishop of Chicago. Which is reason to regret that the autobiography is not indexed. There is a ton of information in the book, and the book is a hefty one. Why is Greeley the priest not welcome in post-Cody Chicago even for weekend parish work? Answer: The new cardinal-archbishop's precondition that he stop writing novels with sex in them. But there's no index to steer one quickly to that detail or to other data.

This is too bad, for as scholars of the future will be revisiting Greeley's studies, so will researchers be studying Greeley himself. They will have to if they're probing American Catholicism of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s. There will be no escaping him. The paradox so far as his autobiography is concerned is that the Greeley of historical importance is not

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likely to be the Greeley of autobiographical preoccupation.

The important Greeley is the Greeley of those numerous studies on Catholic education, on the priesthood, on ethnicity, on the sociology of religion in various contexts, on the American Catholic as social entity. The important Greeley is the person who functioned as scholarly technician for a changing church, who broached intriguing ideas like a limited-term priesthood, who bearded the most powerful on their own turf, as when he went to Rome to tell the pope-makers how they should be making popes. (The present system is dismissed as "chaotic and irresponsible," despite being able to produce occasional "happy flukes" like a Roncalli and a Luciani, Greeley favorites.)

The autobiography's preoccupation, on the other hand, is with Greeley the storyteller, the Greeley who in mid-life reached out for a larger audience with what he calls "stories of God, comedies of grace, parables of divine love" in which the "sacramentality of human sexuality" is a major theme.

Well, Greeley found that larger audience, to be sure. But that his novels are all he claims for them, including a catechetical force, is another question. Admittedly, it is difficult to argue the point in the face of Greeley's enormous success. Some twelve million copies of the novels sold in the space of four years, and new titles were being announced with such regularity that it seemed his name would be anchored forever on best-seller lists. That hasn't turned out to be exactly the case, but it is not to say that there won't be another blockbuster like *The Cardinal Sins*, some three million copies of which went to market. The problem is, obviously, that best-seller status and quality are not necessarily parts of one coin. Jacqueline Susann was on best-seller lists too. Greeley would counter that he really doesn't care whether his novels are immortal (though he suspects their "overarching sociological framework" may give them more durability than critics would concede), but rather that people read them now.

It is characteristic of the sociologist in him that Greeley would go to the trouble of compiling a sociological portrait of readers of his novels (average age 39, 65 percent Catholic, 75 percent women, etc.), and gather data on reactions to his sex scenes (overwhelmingly positive) and the effect of the novels on their religious lives. (Seventy percent of reader respondents of *Ascent into Hell* reported the novel made them think seriously about religious problems, and almost two-thirds said the book caused them to have greater respect for the priesthood.)

This, it would seem, is a man with much to prove — to himself, no doubt (that his novels are, in fact, catechetical instruments), to the overseers of Catholic morals and mores (that the sexual metaphor of his stories is sacramental, not salacious or denigrating), to who knows who else. But are the surveying, compiling, extrapolating, interpreting all that necessary? Cannot the novels be their own statement, in the manner of those of others who have dealt in sin and redemption, failures and new beginnings — Greene, Waugh, Mauriac, Bernanos — whose shades Greeley invokes, although, in fairness, not claiming the same kind of talent, not explicitly at any rate? No shrinking violet, Andrew.

> *My own solution to the celibacy problem is a limited-term priesthood, a "Priest Corps," not unlike the Peace Corps. In the not too distant past, to be a priest forever meant to be a priest for ten years, because, on the average, priests died at about 35 (in 19th-century Chicago, from cholera epidemics). Can we not create an environment in which, after someone has fulfilled a commitment of five or ten years to the priestly ministry, he may go forth with dignity and honor and gratitude — still a priest but not in the active ministry save in times of emergency? Would not such a man be a special kind of husband and father in the world because of his years of service in the priesthood?*
>
> — Andrew Greeley
> *Confessions of a Parish Priest*

When Greeley becomes subjectively sociological, he begins to lose audience. Otherwise he is fascinating, as he whisks readers through old skirmishes, relives triumphs and disappointments, and stokes up smoldering animosities, of which there are many, including his *Commonweal* one. Grievances are deep, and some may be self-indulgent. I can't imagine, for instance, that envy permeates the clerical culture as thoroughly as is maintained. And as a one-time *Commonweal* editor, who was around more than eleven years, it needs to be proved to me that one of us used to feed "anonymous," "nasty" anti-Greeley quotes to the *New York Times*.

Here, as in other places, Greeley does not name names, explaining he doesn't want to use the memoir as an occasion to get even. Mostly, though, the unnamed are secondary figures in the autobiography. Principals are named, and although judgments are often very harsh, Greeley's is not a vindictive or libelous tract. He even let Cardinal Bernardin see certain pages, and deleted passages where Bernardin's recollection of the facts differed from his. But to say that Greeley made this accommodation is not to suggest that he pulls any punches. Even Bernardin gets his lumps.

In sum, Greeley's is a candid look at his church, its leaders, his colleagues, himself in his several roles — as individualist, sociologist, professor, storyteller, priest. (Greeley prizes the title parish priest, though his parish, to borrow from writer Mark Harris, is largely his mailbox these days.) Many people write autobiographies who needn't have. That's not Andrew Greeley's case. His is a life and self-view which should be on the record, if only for the narrower denominational world of Roman Catholicism. If his book is self-serving, what autobiography isn't? If it tells us more about Andrew Greeley than we could possibly want to know, well brace yourselves. There's more to come. *Confessions of a Parish Priest* is but volume one of his autobiography. That's Greeley's word, and what Greeley says, Greeley means.

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Punished, unfinished, untouched

PORTRAIT OF DELMORE

JOURNALS AND NOTES OF DELMORE SCHWARTZ, 1939-1959

Edited by Elizabeth Pollet

Farrar Straus & Giroux, $35, 663 pp.

THE MIDDLE GENERATION

THE LIVES AND POETRY OF DELMORE SCHWARTZ, RANDALL JARRELL, JOHN BERRYMAN, AND ROBERT LOWELL

Bruce Bawer

Archon Books, $22.50, 280 pp.

Robert Phillips

IN the end, he possessed nothing but his self-awareness — which those who knew him hoped he mercifully had lost. As early as January 1944, Delmore Schwartz recorded in his journal, "married and parted, published and punished, unfinished and appeased, and envied and hardly understood. So much is over and so much rejected, so much desired and tossed and untouched." At the time of this entry the poet was barely thirty-one.

The question he repeatedly asks throughout these journals is, "Who is Delmore Schwartz?" He began to see every birthday as a funeral. He compared himself to Melville and Rembrandt, both of whom also lost early fame. One late entry reads,

> Delmore Schwartz
> October 28, 1957
> Alone, in a hotel room,
> Almost penniless — in the 44th
> year of his age . . .

A December 31, 1958 entry predicts for himself an untimely death from not taking care of himself, working too hard, and taking too many drugs. Death in fact did come early, but not until July 11, 1966, in another seedy hotel where he was still living alone.

Much of this long book is depressing — accounts of gas and lights being turned off for non-payment, insomnia, a heart attack in Bellevue (the result of abrupt withdrawal from all drugs and sedation), rejection by friends and publishers. Just as Henry James dutifully recorded the number of dinner engagements he accepted in London society, so Schwartz renders astonishing accounts of the number of pills and drinks he consumed. One day he took eight Dexedrines (which gave him a lift for only one hour). Another day after dinner he drank three glasses of sherry, three quarts of beer, and three shots of whiskey.

Yet there are reasons why anyone interested in Schwartz and the poetry of America's Middle Generation should read this book. For one, there is a surprising amount of new poetry. While none ranks with Schwartz's best — typically he would copy out the most promising poetic passages, type them, and begin revision for possible publication — some of the unpublished poetry is fine. This includes a thirty-three-line lyric which begins,

> The fantasy and the horror of the
> circus,
> The crude coarse cruelty. The
> grace and roar,
> The lion and the whip of reason
> dressed
> In a black top hat, notable and formal . . .

Other interesting poems include "Old Letters"; poems on his alter ego, Rinehart; and sections of a long work never finished, "Dear Pope." There also is uncollected light verse, including a seven-line invective against "Bogan, Louise, a Poetess." La Bogan never gave Schwartz a good or even fair review.

The journals also contain ideas and beginnings for essays. Subjects include Dostoevsky's later work, Ring Lardner, Heinrich Heine, and comparisons between Fitzgerald's Gatsby and James's Isabel Archer. There are beginnings of short stories, and he also posits notes toward symbology in his own work: snow, a central image for Schwartz, he calls "Newness, renewal, freedom, the space in which we walk."

More important are Schwartz's notes on prosody. There are instructive entries on form, diction, meter and rhythm, color and stress:

> The duty of prose is to be a window.
>
> The effect of poetry is to be a stained-glass window.
>
> Form is an endless effort, and not only that, but perhaps the secret of life.
>
> The proper subject matter of the lyric is the emotions.
>
> The object is to be as brief as possible, not as copious; in the end, it is one book, *Collected Poems*.

Much of this material is stated epigrammatically, and elsewhere in writing his journals he discovered witty phrases and puns he later would lard into his poems, stories, essays, and letters: "A horse divided against itself cannot stand"; "The wife you save may be your own"; "Gentlemen prefer bonds"; "You are all a tossed generation"; and the mathematician's song, "I love my wife, but oh, Euclid!"

Much of the black humor involves wives. ("She was frigid, he was rigid. What a marriage.") A psychoanalyst could have a field day. Schwartz seems to have had an Oedipal trauma early in life. His mother, the redoubtable Rose Schwartz, is however depicted in some hilarious moments, as when she exclaims, on hearing her sister has cancer, "Everything happens to me!"

Schwartz was totally conscious of entering and leaving all his manic phases, which could last as long as six months. He records his absence of passion, obsession, or pleasure. For months the only writing he could accomplish was to copy out sections of *Finnegans Wake*. The act satisfied some deep need beyond love of language. Ultimately he learned to write his own poems even when deeply depressed. He found just "the preliminary arrangement of material gives inspiration freer dancing and transcending." Only the writing of new poems (and occasional financial rescue) could pull him from the pit.

One revelation of this book is that Schwartz did manage to write splendidly late in his career, a feat not commonly

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acknowledged. Poems such as "All the Fruits Had Fallen," "The Innocent & Infinite Windows of Childhood," "The Fulfillment," "Vivaldi," and his luminous late "Seurat's Sunday Afternoon Along the Seine," demonstrate, as editor Elizabeth Pollet states, that Schwartz was writing poems "in a key of transcendence and exaltation" even in the midst of disintegration and desperation. An almost intolerable entry for the last journal, found in his last hotel room, is indicative of both the depths of his despair and the undeniable fact that his gift stayed with him:

The poisonous world flows into my
mouth
Like water into a drowning man's.

Only one who has seen Delmore Schwartz's handwriting can appreciate the formidible task of preparing this volume. A small, largely illegible scrawl, often racing in all directions across a page, his hand sometimes defeats even a magnifying glass. Ms. Pollet, a novelist who was also Schwartz's second wife, has devoted four years to transcribing and editing 2400 sheets of journal entries and notes, which became a 1400-page typescript eventually reduced to 900 pages. Her notes are scrupulouly accurate and her observations fair. Clearly a labor of love, *Portrait of Delmore* is indeed a portrait of the writer's innermost thoughts. It is a valuable document.

Bruce Bawer's *The Middle Generation* is a comprehensive and unified history and critique of the lives and works of Schwartz, Jarrell, Berryman, and Lowell. What will surprise some readers is how Bawer places Schwartz at the center of his generation, at the expense of Theodore Roethke and Elizabeth Bishop, to name two. For the first time Schwartz receives his due as poet and poetic influence. (Even his biographer, James Atlas, did not conceal he had little use for much of Schwartz's writing.)

Bawer's thesis is that the four poets shared a generic life. They exhibited some of the same stresses, problems, and pathological excesses of behavior. The father of each died, either actually or metaphorically, when the child was young. Estrangement, insecurity, resentment, guilt, and insomnia marked their early years. Each related to women in unorthodox ways; among the four of them, they had ten wives. And they shared the irony that the very conditions which crippled them as men gave their poetry its greatest vigor and distinction.

Bawer also demonstrates that each unconsciously sought to replace his own father with the figure of the poet he most admired — T.S. Eliot. He traces Eliot's influence throughout the work of all four, but feels that influence reaches its apogee in Schwartz's *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (1938), which he calls "a keynote volume." Bauer says that in its "al-

lusiveness, ambiguity, indirection, intelligence, impersonality, and audacious taking on of imposing forms," the book was perfect raw material for The New Criticism. Bawer reads most of the poems in the collection as based on Eliot's chief poetic theme, which Schwartz called "the fate of Western Culture and the historic scene."

It hardly bespeaks remarkable perspicacity to aver that Eliot's influence dominated poetry of the middle period. But where Bawer begins to make an original contribution is when he traces the apostasy from Eliot and the influences of Pound and Whitman, especially Whitman, upon the four poets' later work. He convincingly argues that Schwartz's *Vaudeville for a Princess* (1950) was a deliberate nose-thumbing at Eliot, a book which rejects everything Eliot preached about tradition. (Bawer is also the first critic to observe that the prose pieces which precede *Vaudeville*'s poetry sections echo the themes of the poems themselves.)

More new ground is broken when Bawer discusses Schwartz's later poems, work most critics have ignored or lamented. One called them "Haphazard, euphonious, virtually incomprehensible effusions . . ." that "verge on being devoid of any sense whatever." Bawer proves these late verses are modeled after Whitman rather than Eliot. They represent a clean break with Schwartz's early style, and are highly successful in their own right. They "speak as powerfully to our senses as his early poems speak to our minds." In his reassessment of Schwartz, Bawer has examined not only the later poems in *Summer Knowledge* (1959), but also those in *Last and Lost Poems*. So far as I know, he is the first critic to take an extended look at that book, published in 1979 to universal silence.

Bawer also reveals how Lowell's *Life Studies* became the new "keynote volume" for the Middle Generation's late period, as Schwartz's *In Dreams . . .* was for their early period. Based on Lowell's example, the work of all four tended to lose tension in form; the tension was now in the material. Throughout, Bawer draws parallels between their lives as well as their work, and limns their influences on one another as well as from the outside — Yeats on Berryman, Auden on Jarrell, the Symbolists on Lowell.

There are better and fuller discussions of Lowell in print; of the four poets, he is the academics' darling, and entire books are devoted to his work. And Bawer is a bit niggardly in his treatment of Jarrell, as well as somewhat misleading when he states that the predominate subject of the poet's early work is "a war in which he did not participate." While Jarrell never shipped overseas or saw combat, he did enlist in the Air Corps as a pilot in 1942 and was not discharged until 1946.

But Bawer is to be commended for his impatience with most of late Berryman, and especially for his fresh and revolutionary examination of Schwartz's *oeuvre*. Anyone who reads *The New Criterion* has to believe that Bruce Bawer is a critic of the first order, one of the best we have today. In *The Middle Generation* he has produced a first book which confirms that belief.

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A positive Jewish theology of the church

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS
Pinchas Lapide
Augsburg, $8.95, 160 pp.

JESUS IN TWO PERSPECTIVES
Pinchas Lapide and Ulrich Luz
Augsburg, $8.95, 174 pp.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
Pinchas Lapide
Orbis, $9.95, 148 pp.

Paul M. van Buren

WITH the publication of *The Sermon on the Mount,* we now have in English translation five of the ten books that Pinchas Lapide has published in German over the past ten years. Half of them (represented by the second volume here under review) were jointly authored with a major Protestant or Catholic theologian, but even they bear the distinctive stamp of this Orthodox Jewish New Testament scholar and rather unorthodox Jewish ecumenist. What is unorthodox about him is that as a committed, believing, Orthodox Jew, he is determined to move out from under Christianity's horrible past history of hatred for the Jews and build the foundations for a new positive relationship between the church and the Jewish people. Each of the books under review is a product of that determination. Here is ecumenism at a daring level.

Lapide's book on the resurrection of Jesus is surely his most provocative and cost him many a friendship among his own people. How could a Jew argue the case that those Jewish disciples of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth, in proclaiming that God has raised Jesus from the dead, were not deluded or deceivers? His answer is this: "as a faithful Jew, I cannot explain a historical development which, despite many errors and much confusion, has carried the central message of Israel from Jerusalem into the world of nations, as the result of blind happenstance or human error." He is able to come to this reasoning by starting from the fact that the Easter experience and Easter faith were totally Jewish matters. No Gentile had any part in them. It all had to do with Jewish convictions about the God of Israel and what had happened in the events surrounding that remarkable rabbi from Nazareth.

Readers should be aware that Lapide is not alone among Jewish scholars of the New Testament, largely but hardly exclusively in Israel, who have been contributing much in recent years to the discovery of the Jewishness of Jesus, his disciples, and the early witness of the Jesus movement that was to become the Gentile church. No more than any of his Jewish colleagues does Lapide think that his conclusion is the least reason for him to become a Christian. On the contrary, precisely because he thinks that Christians are committed to the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, and because he can show that Jews have never associated resurrection with the Messiah, to believe that something authentic actually happened "on the third day" that produced Easter faith is perfectly possible for a Jew. But for a Jew this in no way shows that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus brought none of the fruits which the Messiah will bring, so he cannot have been the Messiah. What he did bring was a movement that has spread the name and the worship of the God of Israel to billions of Gentiles. For that work of *praeparatio messianica* Lapide is profoundly grateful, precisely as a believing Jew.

In the second book, *Jesus in Two Perspectives,* Lapide argues from the New Testament evidence that Jesus did not identify himself as the Messiah, was not rejected by his people, and did not himself reject them. These theses, rebutting staples of the anti-Judaic tradition of the church, however, are by now shared by most Christian scholars. Many a so-called educated Christian, however, might well profit from reading Lapide's clear refutation of long-held beliefs, not least because he is critically much more conservative than his Christian respondent, who is professor of New Testament at the University of Bern. Jewish as well as Christian readers will be interested in Luz's suggestions that the real issues between Jews and Christians remain after agreement on Lapide's three theses has been reached.

The last book, *The Sermon on the Mount*, is a careful study of Matthew 5, the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, using the method associated with the so-called Jerusalem School of New Testament exegesis: careful attention to the idiom and imagery of the first-century Hebrew and Aramaic that must have been the original language behind the Greek text, and putting the material in the context of first-century Jewish life and thought, as well as this can be reconstructed from other Jewish sources. The subtitle of this study is "Utopia or Program for Action?" Lapide makes a thought-provoking case for the latter, with strong arguments against the usual ways of "getting around" the hard sayings. There could scarcely be a Christian preacher, pastor, or layperson who would not learn from Lapide's book a new respect for this text and for its original author. The original author having been a Jew speaking only to Jews, it should not be surprising if a Jewish interpreter could open up the text for Christians.

Dr. Lapide showed with his first book, *Hebrew in the Church* (German original, 1976, Eerdmans, 1984), a sensitivity to Christian theological and devotional language that has made his work of prime ecumenical importance. In reading him, we are out on the cutting edge of the so-called Jewish-Christian dialogue. When he seems to misunderstand Christianity, therefore, it is all the more important to listen to him with care. Whose fault is it, one must ask, that he should think that belief that Jesus is the Messiah is what makes a person a Christian? It's as if the Jewish concept of Messiah came near to defining what Jesus is for Christians, as if the Apostle to the Gentiles had not taught us that "Christ" is a proper name. Again, who has led Lapide to believe that differences over Jesus were the cause of the parting of the ways between developing rabbinic Judaism and the little church that the Jesus movement had

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become? In fact, the separation occurred because the rabbis, after the disastrous war with Rome, assumed responsibility for reconstructing the Jewish community around faithfulness to Torah and a life based on that, and as a consequence, but a secondary matter, they were concerned to fend off the increasingly Gentile movement the church had become.

If these are misunderstandings, as I am convinced they are, they are first of all misunderstandings on the part of the Christian church, but it is painful to see a Jew sharing them.

Lapide is surely correct theologically in seeing in Jesus the bond between the church and the Jewish people, because he is correct historically in seeing him as a Jew in a Jewish context. More daringly, he has advanced beyond any Jewish author with whom I am familiar, including even Franz Rosenzweig, in seeing the church as a vital piece of the history of God's covenant and so a matter for Jewish prayer and concern. He is building a positive Jewish theology of the Christian church which challenges the church to come up with a positive Christian theology of the Jewish people. Does he speak for the Jewish people in doing this? Would his Christian counterpart be speaking for the church in rising to his challenge? No, in both cases it is a matter of speaking on behalf of a future greatly different from the past in which both Jews and Christians are deeply mired. In Lapide's case, I would call it a glorious illustration of undying Jewish messianism, which cannot help but irritate, challenge, and stimulate anyone who cares at all about the Jewish-Christian relationship.

Small gestures, large patterns

THE BEET QUEEN

Louise Erdrich
Henry Holt, $16.95, 338 pp.

Linda Simon

BEFORE she won the 1984 National Book Critics Circle award for her novel *Love Medicine,* Louise Erdrich already had gained acclaim as a poet. A collection of her poetry, *Jacklight,* was also published in that year. *The Beet Queen* is very much a poet's novel, and the texture of the prose finally is more seductive even than the movement of the plot. It is a novel that throbs, at times, with the intensity of its small vignettes. In one deceptively quiet scene, a mother nursing her infant daughter notices a spider in the baby's fine hair:

> It was a delicate thing, close to transparent, with long sheer legs. It moved so quickly that it seemed to vibrate, throwing out invisible strings and catching them, weaving its own tensile strand. Celestine watched as it began to happen. A web was forming, a complicated house, that Celestine could not bring herself to destroy.

The novel itself reveals a complicated web of relationships from which no character can extricate herself. The men and women who people *The Beet Queen* are bound by ties that they only partially understand, and they live out patterns that seem unalterable.

Mary Adare and her two brothers are orphaned when their mother abandons them by flying off with a carnival stunt pilot. The three children, one an infant, set off for their aunt's house in Argus, North Dakota. On the way, the baby is taken by a young man who wants to console his wife for the loss of their infant. Karl, the other brother, runs from Mary and sets off on his own. Only Mary arrives, telling her improbable tale. She is welcomed by her aunt and uncle, but resented by her cousin Sita, who even as a child has aristocratic pretensions and little tolerance for other people.

Mary, Sita, and their friend Celestine James are the focus of this novel, and we follow their lives from 1932, when Mary comes to Argus, to 1972, when Celestine's daughter, Dot (fathered by Karl Adare), is named Beet Queen during a local festival. In those forty years, Mary grows up to become a butcher, like her aunt and uncle. Sita, married, divorced, and remarried, fails as a restaurant owner (Chez Sita, the establishment is called — Mary pronounces it to rhyme with Pez), and slowly goes crazy. Celestine raises her daughter alone, requesting that the troublesome Karl stay away. Eventually, she and Mary find themselves caring for Sita, irascible as ever.

When Celestine says of Mary that she "tries to get her imagination to mend the holes in her understanding," she could well be referring to any of the three women. Not given to reflection, trusting in a visceral response to the world, they seek signs and portents to guide their lives. Mary, most overtly, believes in forces that defy human intervention: she reads palms, spits on bricks to determine dates of future events, and dreams ominous dreams.

Despite the often grotesque events in their lives (the Adare children's abandonment, for one; Mary's "miraculous" fall on the ice at school, for another, a fall that produces a pattern the teaching nuns proclaim as the face of Jesus), the women are unremittingly prosaic. Having a child and naming her, Mary remarks about Celestine, "was the first thing Celestine ever did out of the ordinary," and apparently the last. For these women, "out of the ordinary" means "as an act of free will." They seem bound by fate, and so do their men.

Karl, Celestine's friend Wallace Pfef, and Russell Kashpaw, an Indian who fought in the Korean War and now, a quadriplegic, who wastes away in a wheelchair, also seem characters to whom life happens. Small gestures of individuality help them to survive, but do not alter the patterns which they find themselves enacting. Wallace, for example, when he discovers he is homosexual, prominently hangs a portrait of a young woman in his house. She is taken to be his dead fiancée, and the community explains his refusal to marry by his undying love. Wallace becomes a respected businessman, and his own sexual encounter is, briefly, with Karl Adare. He lives his life as an escort to the town's unattached women, with his secret safely hidden.

Within these bleak lives, however, there are luminous moments. If the char-

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SONNETS by Marie Ponsot

One Is One

Heart, you bully, you punk, I'm wrecked. I'm shocked
stiff. You? you still try to rule the world — though
I've got you: identified, starving, locked
in a cage you will not leave alive, no
matter how you hate it, pound its walls,
& thrill its corridors with messages.
Brute. Spy. I trusted you. Now you reel & brawl
in your cell but I'm deaf to your rages,
your greed to go solo, your eloquent
threats of worse things you (knowing me) could do.
You scare me, bragging you're a double agent
since jailers are prisoners' prisoners too.
Think! Reform! Make us one. Join the rest of us,
and joy will come, and make its test of us.

Unplugged

Once, you were translucent; you stood between
me and the source; you tempered the light, became
the light I chose to see by. I have seen
by earth-light, straight, for a long time now. I name
the objects, powerful, that I have kept:
my bed, my laundry, my pantry, my stairs.

You took the valuables when you left.
Abandoning our old lamps and chairs
you unscrewed that incandescent choice of mine:
you my constant, the light-speed I saw by.
Disconnected you vanished. I define
growing things one by one, with my own eyes.

I miss, dismiss the lust for free obedience.
In natural light the world the world is immense.

The Title's Last

Here's the best joke, though its flavor is salt:
the bad company I've kept, the bad risks I've run
have left me standing (a figure of fun
but) one at whose shadow some strangers halt.
I've been pole when some asked, so they could vault
supported, high as they like, letting me drop
intact & roll, safe, to a grassy stop.

Explorers Cry Out Unheard

What I have in mind is the last wilderness.

I sweat to learn its heights of sun, scrub, ants,
its gashes full of shadows and odd plants,
as inch by inch it yields to my hard press.
And the way behind me changes as I advance.
If interdependence shapes the biomass,
though I plot my next step by pure chance
I can't go wrong. Even willfull deviance
connects me to all the rest. The changing past
includes & can't excerpt me. Memory grants
just the nothing it knows, & my distress
drives me toward the imagined truths I stalk,
those savages. It haunts me, their extinct talk
that charts less and more as more and less.

Better

After a long wet season the rain's let up.
The list my life was on was critical;
reproach soaked it and infected my ears.
I hid, deaf & blind, my skin my hospital,
in the inoperable ache of fear.

Today the rain stops. I can hear! Trees drip.
They spatter & whisper as I walk their
breathing avenue. The wind has died back;
a general light elaborates the air.
From the road car-tunes rush close then slacken.
I climb the green hill. There at last I reach
a figured stillness where no nightmares slide.
Green leaves turn inside out to grow. They breach
their barriers, I see. I come, eyes wide, outside.

We've gone our ways with pleasure & without fault,
they to the next race, I to the next use
poles are put to by the great competitors.

Self-schooled I've been fish, ocean floors
wrinkling my shadow, flashing free, loose,
in my long survival of all I've done —
for sharks that bite me eat death by poison,
le requin qui me mord s'empoisonne.

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acters cannot probe their own personalities and motivations, they eagerly render for us the power of the physical landscape. Here is Mary, for example, describing the North Dakota winter:

> My fruit trees suffered. The snow came so high that rabbits gnawed the trunks and upper limbs, girdling them completely so that even spring, when new buds should have shown, was a time of death. In the shelterbelts, I came across more of the deer's frail hulks and the banks of the river stank of bleached carp. An old man was found, one who for years had lived alone. He was curled in a large drift beneath his clothesline and his arms were full of towels.

The Beet Queen is filled with such passages, which convey a palpable reality of the midwest at its most grim and forbidding. Yet despite Erdrich's striking skill and imagination, her characters keep the novel from being totally satisfying. In the end, the distinct narrative voices of Mary, Sita, and Celestine blur, and our sympathies with them cannot go far enough. Yet Erdrich is a writer who has been justifiably lauded, and even with its weaknesses, *The Beet Queen* stands as a product of enormous talent.

Awakening the people

A MACHINE THAT WOULD GO BY ITSELF
THE CONSTITUTION IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Michael Kammen
Knopf, $29.95, 532 pp.

John Patrick Diggins

THE PUBLICATION of Michael Kammen's new book seems perfectly timed to appear as America is about to celebrate the Bicentennial of the Constitution. It is thoughtful, well written, and exhaustively researched. The only problem is that Kammen has written a book on a subject that has failed to arouse any wide concern since the great ratifying debates of 1787-88. Kammen can show how all political parties and geographical sections invoked the Constitution either as strict or broad constructionists. But this is old hat historiography. More difficult is the task of demonstrating the "impact" and "influence" of "the Constitution in American culture," as the book's subtitle and introduction imply. Let's face it, John Lennon has had more impact on American culture than John Adams, which perhaps shows that the Puritans were right about the corruptions of music.

Kammen, a Cornell professor and author of a number of important works of history, is honest enough to acknowledge that the Constitution has been met with "indifference" and "ignorance." He quotes Supreme Court justices and cites questionnaires to indicate the extent to which Americans have failed to understand the meaning and significance of the Constitution, including the fundamental principles of the Bill of Rights. Today school books may still refer to the Constitution as "sacred and glorious," but most students respond with a yawn. Was it any different in the past?

In the 1887 Centennial held at Philadelphia lavish preparations were made to honor the handiwork of the framers. President Cleveland attended and used the occasion to praise American industry and chide businessmen who put profits ahead of patriotism. Many distinguished Americans, including eminent literary figures, had turned down invitations, as did America's leading historian, George Bancroft. Perhaps with good reason. As one observer complained, there was nothing "in the object of the celebration that especially awakened the interests of the people."

Apparently Kammen believes that the forthcoming Bicentennial will succeed in awakening the people to a renewed respect for the Constitution. He tells us that E.L. Godkin, who predicted that a future Bicentennial would value the Civil War amendments (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth) more than the original Constitution and its framers, "will prove to be wrong about the American memory in 1987." No doubt there will be celebrations and fireworks, and Chief Justice Warren Burger will go out in a blaze of glory. But public festivities usually celebrate that which society chooses not to value or uphold. Was "Hands Across America" really about awakening Americans to their obligations to the poor? Or was it what the sixties generation used to call a "happening"?

The title of Kammen's book comes from an observation by James Russell Lowell:

> After our Constitution got fairly into working order it really seemed as if we had invented a machine that would go of itself, and this begot faith in our luck which even the Civil War itself but momentarily disturbed. . . . I admire the splendid complacency of my countrymen, and find something exhilarating and inspiring in it. We are a nation which has *struck ile*, but we are also a nation that is sure that the well will never run dry. And this confidence in our luck with the absorption in material interests, generated by unparalleled opportunity, has in some re-

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THE REVEREND DR. PAUL M. VAN BUREN, *director of the Center for Contemporary Theology of the Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, is the author of* A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality, Parts I and II *(with* Part III *forthcoming from Harper and Row).*

LINDA SIMON *is director of The Writing Center at Harvard University.*

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS *is the author of* The Lost Soul of American Politics.

J.V. LONG *is writing a critical study of Evelyn Waugh.*

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spects made us neglectful of our political duties.

Implicit in Kammen's book, and in much other scholarship as well as the idea of the forthcoming Bicentennial, is the assumption that the Constitution and the political institutions it bequeathed both explain and sustain America as a modern republic. Yet Tocqueville, Thoreau, Henry Adams, and several other important writers saw things differently. The Constitution may have succeeded in preserving liberty for two centuries, but not for the reasons that the framers had in mind in 1787. Nevertheless, the framers deserve to be celebrated as brilliant political philosophers who told us the truth about human nature.

The capitalist revolution (cont.)

(Continued from page 558)

and liberation, and so on. There is an occasional qualification, an admission that contemporary capitalism sometimes deviates from the market model or that there are markets in some Communist societies, but these are essentially extended parentheses which do not interfere with the main thrust of the argument. That thrust is essentially structured by the market-economy/command-economy polarity which also predetermines the data and therefore the conclusions to be drawn from them.

But then there is a curious aside which almost gives the game way. After summarizing that "*All democracies are capitalist; no democracy is socialist; many capitalist societies are not democracies,*" Berger then comments, "It goes without saying that a different definition of 'democracy' would permit very different statements about the empirical distribution of the phenomenon." Yes, indeed. And there would be an even greater revolution in the "empirical" data if, say, Berger were to use the definition of socialism adopted by the seventy-five parties of the Socialist International in June: "the most profound, comprehensive, and international democracy."

The point is, as John Dewey so well put it, that the data are never given; they are taken. And the criteria of relevance for the "taking" of the data should not be hidden in value-laden definitions which set up "value free" deductions. Berger writes, "It is permissible to say, flatly, that Belgium is a capitalist society and Bulgaria a socialist one." The problem is, neither I nor, what is more important, the democratic socialist movement of the world would give anyone permission to say that Bulgaria is socialist. If I thought it were, I would quit that socialist movement forthwith.

It is too bad that one has to be constantly irritated throughout this book by the invisible hand of Berger's definitions. I say this not simply because of his solid work in the past, but because of the one chapter in *The Capitalist Revolution* from which I actually learned something. It is significant that East Asia does not fit easily even into Berger's definitions. If he can cite South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan as capitalist successes, they are authoritarian and *dirigiste* examples of capitalism. Moreover, their history and development involve cultural factors, like the economic impact of Confucianism, that require one to go beyond Weberian categories of modernization (though I think that Weber anticipated this possibility to a degree that Berger does not recognize).

It is precisely when Berger thus escapes from the tyranny of his own definitions that he is interesting and even somewhat unpredictable. But when he is sure of himself, which is most of the time, he is simply a disingenuous faction fighter. For instance, his discussion of the third world, with the exception of East Asia, is based on a refutation of Lenin. Which is easy enough, and a misreading of dependency theory. For dependency theory never argued that the world market would totally frustrate development in the poor countries, but that it would misshape it so that even when progress was made, it would not change the basic relation of inferiority to the metropolitan powers. The Mexicans, who have recently seen their living standards plummet at the insistence of the world's banks, the International Monetary Fund, and the Reagan administration, might provide empirical evidence for this assertion.

When Berger briefly takes up the theme of monopoly, state planning, and welfare outlays in the market economies, he does so primarily within an Arthur Laffer framework, i.e., asking whether leftist redistribution has already gone so far as to kill the capitalist goose that lays the golden eggs. One problem with this argument is that the data show, alas, that this famous redistribution did not take place. According to the recent analysis of wealth from the Census, the richest 1.9 percent of our households have a mean net worth of $1,069,880 and the bottom 11 percent of the households have mean assets of *minus* $3,455.

In his brief remarks on the "new class" in advanced capitalism, Berger sees it as inherently anti-capitalist, a notion which is quite sixtyish and blissfully ignorant of, say, the Gary Hart campaign of 1984. In this case, I truly wish that

Christmas is coming . . .

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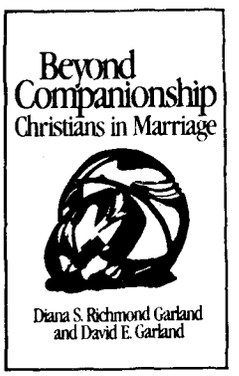
Berger were right; unfortunately he is not. But then, precisely because this book is definitional it omits the dynamic factors, like the reappearance of monopoly in the deregulated airline industry. And he really doesn't confront state intervention. When that quintessential conservative, Paul Volker, lowered the discount rate at the Fed recently, was that an imperative of the market?

But perhaps one of the most revealing single moments in Berger's book occurs when he talks of the superiority of socialism over capitalism in the domain of myth-making, a backhanded compliment if ever there were one. The socialists, he charges, can build upon those utopian and metahistorical yearnings that intellectuals find so irresistible. The capitalists, humble as methodological empiricists, have only the prosaic facts of their magnificent performance. Adam Smith, Berger writes, "believed that the economic system he was describing . . . was, quite simply, the natural ordering of society; that which is natural, almost by definition, does not require legitimation, mythic or otherwise (who would think of legitimating the law of gravity or concocting myths so that people will be inspired to act in accordance with it?)."

What Berger, of course, has described is *the* capitalist myth, the notion that this system is the expression of a perennial human nature, of a *homo economicus* who sometimes uses stone tools as capital and sometimes computers, but always must employ capital. There is a famous book which Berger knows quite well, *Das Kapital*, whose central theme is a refutation of this mythic, metahistorical notion which also sometimes speaks to the yearnings of other intellectuals.

Berger is one of those intellectuals. As befits a scientistic age, he has translated the providential powers of Adam Smith's markets into social science data, and thus "empirical" reality. Like nature in the eighteenth century, social science data are the objective guarantee for profoundly subjective choices. I believe it was Condorcet who said that conservatism always wants to enlist nature on the side of inequality. Now the data get that job.

HELPFUL GUIDES FOR SPECIAL—AND ORDINARY—Families



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New collections, new pleasures

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER
Peter Cameron
Harper & Row, $15.95, 181 pp.

THE PIANO TUNER
Peter Meinke
University of Georgia, $13.95, 156 pp.

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Russell Banks
Harper & Row, $15.95, 183 pp.

THE NEWS FROM IRELAND
William Trevor
Viking, $16.95, 285 pp.

J. V. Long

OCCASIONALLY it is tempting to review several volumes at once by isolating in one a standard against which the various deficiencies and pleasures of the others can be measured, as if the books were in competition. Happily, in this case, such book-bashing is unnecessary; the pleasures to be discovered in each of these collections of short stories are more apparent and more memorable than any of their deficiencies. On the other hand, I don't mean to suggest that it is not possible to draw distinctions among the collections; nor would I wish to deny that, in any grouping, William Trevor's *The News from Ireland* would be stunning.

Peter Cameron's first collection of short stories, *One Way or Another*, is wonderful. His literary turf is similar to that of another accomplished young writer, David Leavitt — the lives and environments of young, educated, middle-class people who are coping with the conventions and demands of personal and professional ambition. His work is heartfelt and ironic and, in his best stories, has real depth as he makes characters who are forced to explore the intricacy and ambiguity inherent in the world of modern relationships. They are characters who want and wonder and regret as they figure out whom (among their siblings, parents, and grandparents; wives, husbands, and lovers) and how to love.

Most of the stories are first person narrations, and all of them include a precise attention to concrete detail. Indeed, this attentiveness to the objects that surround the characters' lives provides a solid grounding for the fictions' truthfulness. In "Memorial Day" a sixteen-year-old retreats into silence from his mother and her new husband, who have found themselves, and met each other, through a self-help seminar run by "this guy without a body who speaks out of the corner of the mouth of this lady and tells you how to fix your life." The stepfather tries, unsuccessfully, to make an overture with popsicles to the mute teenager who reflects, "I have this feeling, holding the stained wooden sticks, that I will keep them for a long time, and come across them one day, and remember this moment, incorrectly."

Finally, Cameron's stories seem to be about the necessity and uncertainty of commitment, and the hard costs of fidelity and infidelity. *One Way or Another* is an impressive debut.

Peter Meinke teaches writing and has received The Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction for his collection *The Piano Tuner*. Like O'Connor, Mr. Meinke has a taste for the grotesque, though in his fiction (as opposed to hers) it is generally unrelieved by grace. In these stories violence is an ordinary, even an expected, intrusion; a reader might become impatient with the predictability of the ominous. The arrival of a piano tuner for an afternoon's work; the rescue of a distressed motorist on an empty coastal road in France; a late night gathering of some foreign exchange students: in each instance there are innocents who become victims and are brutalized.

To my mind, the most satisfying story in the collection is "Bracelet," an account of an American archaeologist doing research in Nigeria who surrenders the critical distance available to observers and foreigners and is gradually assimilated over the years until she

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achieves the kind of integration and wisdom which is an even deeper foreignness. The story is understated and haunting and graceful.

Among the twelve stories in Russell Banks's collection, *Success Stories*, several focus on one New Hampshire family, the Painters. There is an emotional investment and clarity in them, especially in the book's first and last stories, "Queen for a Day" and "Firewood," that give them a weight the rest of the stories don't carry. In the former a twelve-year-old boy publicizes the family's misfortune, following his father's desertion, in a series of letters proposing his mother's candidacy to the unspeakable 1950s television program "Queen for a Day." The story is a hard-edged, sad account of reliance, hope, and disappointment. "It's dark, though still late afternoon, and cold, almost cold enough to snow, Earl thinks, which makes him think of Christmas, which in turn makes him cringe and tremble inside and turn quickly back to now, to this very moment, to walking with his tiny, brittle-bodied mother down the quiet street, past houses like their own. . . ."

"Firewood" provides a conclusion of sorts, and its inner weather is affected as well by the winter cold. Earl Painter is grown and reconciled, up to a point, with his alcoholic father whose burdens and memories lie thick as the New Hampshire snow. There is an uneasy familiarity between them that passes for communication, but the scar tissue, which other stories have marked out, is too thick not to thwart love. Reconciliation is merely detente. The energy and pathos in the Painter chronicles give *Success Stories* its real strength.

Mr. Trevor's *The News from Ireland* is a book which is particularly easy to recommend. There is a breadth of feeling and subtlety in these stories that give evidence of a writer absolutely sure of his craft. The scene shifts from Ireland to England to Italy, and everywhere characters are located inside the consequences of their memories and misremembrances. "Virgins," for example, begins with a chance meeting after many years, in the Cathedral in Siena, between two women whose friendship had flowered and faded in adolescent intensity. The story recounts the old friendship and its dissolution and juxtaposes the fullness of memory and feeling with the reality and disappointment of maturity. "How odd to meet here, she says knowing it is not odd at all, since everyone's a tourist nowadays. She wishes they had not met like this; why could not Margaretta just have seen her and let her pass by?"

It is especially easy to recall James Joyce while reading Mr. Trevor. Not only do they share a certain Irish geography, but also Trevor has the same gift for allusive parody that gives such pleasure in *Dubliners*. "At thirty-three Justin Condon was a salesman of women's undergarments, regularly traversing five counties with his samples and his order book in a Ford Fiesta. He had obediently accepted this role, agreeing when his father had suggested it to him. His father in his day had been a commercial traveler also and every Friday Justin returned to

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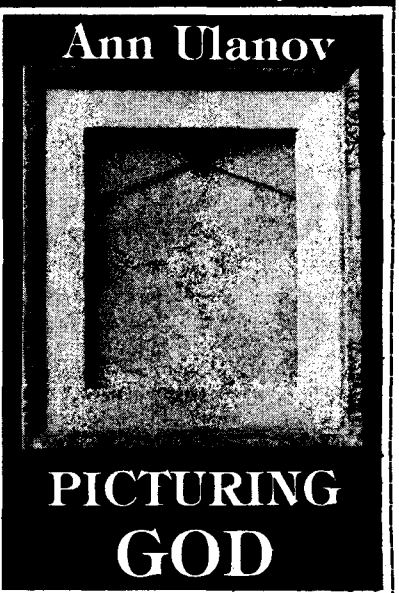

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the house his father had returned to."

The stories in this collection draw a map to an ordinary world whose entanglements are no less demanding for being common. They are about knots of domestic arrangements which are loosened without being entirely smoothed out. Trevor's characters make do more than they make choices, in order to achieve, in Joyce's phrase, "the stern task of living."

In brief

MONKEYS, *by Susan Minot. E.P. Dutton/Seymour Lawrence, $15.95, 159 pp.*

Only the first story, not chapter really, is told by Sophie, one of the seven Vincent children. But the eight other skillfully crafted episodes continue to exhibit a child's-eye view of thirteen years of family life. In lean prose, Susan Minot conveys the intimacies and estrangements that suffuse this world of family.

Events unfold naturally — against a New England setting, with a Harvard connection influencing style, tradition, and expectations — around the universal rhythms of birth, games, holidays, weddings, funerals, and daily dinner conversation.

Minot's first novel demonstrates a keen understanding of the perceptiveness of children who overhear and knowingly interpret parental actions and exchanges:

> [Sherman] got up, all at once aware of himself, and scurried to his mother. The chair went on rocking. Ma stared at it. Rocking empty, it meant something to her.

These perceptions, often of yearning, emptiness, and conflict, furnish the tension that melts each separate story into one long tale that, one senses, will go on for generations.

Minot's ear for dialogue is impeccable. The expletives of children — "shut up" or "gross" — are balanced by descriptive richness: "the echo of water slaps"; "rays wheeled by through pleated shallows"; "skin cracked like rice paper"; and "a cloudy smudge that was the ocean."

And character is created and sustained often through a single phrase left as a clue, added bit by bit to the overall action with great cumulative effect. Only by the end do we realize the impact of what we have been both shown and told — that Dad "barely feels the cold," clings to an ever present bottle of Bourbon, is "never satisfied" with his own work; Mum is "warmblooded," always keeps a small vase of fresh flowers, and "stopped listening to the pope" after the seventh baby.

In one or two sentences Minot sums up an entire mood or pattern of familial interaction, as when the Vincents arrive for Thanksgiving dinner, an inter-generational gathering:

> They talked without looking at each other, their chairs all facing in. Aunt Fran addressed her remarks to the one spot in the room where no one sat or stood.

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Of course, one must be careful of imputing religious elements to fiction where there are none, and this is a tale of an Irish Catholic family where *trappings* of Catholic practice are essential to the story. Still, I think Minot is a writer to watch as a developing Catholic voice, not because *Monkeys* begins with the line, "Our father doesn't go to church with us but we're all downstairs . . ." But because this author ends with a spontaneously invented memorial ritual that, in light of the novel's understated but climactic death, infuses the entire family with both life and hope. K.S.S.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 546)

six women were still alive in 1943.

From their inception, both camps were designed and operated as extermination camps. The complex became, to the Poles, a symbol of Polish martyrdom and Polish resistance long before the West became aware of its existence, before, indeed, any Jews arrived there (*qua* Jews). There is hardly a family in Poland that does not remember at least one of its members as a victim of that camp.

Only after the addition of Birkenau did the camp become both international in scope and a place of martyrdom for many, including the Jews. Auschwitz-Birkenau was only one of many such sites of infamy, many almost strictly Jewish.

All Jews (and some other smaller, groups) were marked by the Nazis for prompt extinction for reason of being what they were. Others (e.g., Poles), as captured Nazi documents make it patent, were marked (again for being what they were) for extinction after the war. The Nazi timetable was strategic, although obviously colored with especially virulent anti-Jewishness. (One lesson to be learnt from that era is that racism is never limited to a single group.)

These are some of the reasons why, whatever the impression in the West, Auschwitz remains in Poland a symbol of Polish martyrdom. A symbol *that does not exclude the memory of the others*, but also remembers those Jews and non-Jews who died in the gas chambers; and remembers the millions who died as surely, albeit more slowly, from torture, work beyond human strength, and starvation. Every Polish church has a chapel of St. Maximilian Kolbe, a symbol of humanity in an inhuman place. There are, to a Pole, many symbols of the *Shoah* within the confines of Poland: Treblinka, the sites of the many ghettos, others too numerous to mention. Thus Cardinal Macharski's response is even more "sensitive" than might appear to a person unacquainted with the fullness of the facts.

Perhaps the reason for not consulting any Jewish groups on the establishment of the convent was not so much insensitivity as incomprehension. A Pole, whose country — "the Land without Stakes" — tried to live religious freedom long before the French and the Americans started paying lip service to it, who, prior to the destruction of World War II,

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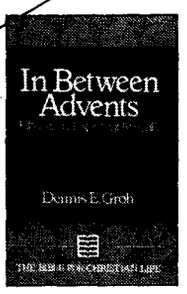

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saw his land dotted with a multitude of ancient churches, synagogues, and mosques, might find it difficult to imagine that anybody would object to any house of prayer, anywhere!

Dr. Fleischner correctly points out Polish concerns (*not* limited to the American Polonia) that Poland's suffering has been largely ignored. Graver concerns are the outright denials of that suffering and the flood of inaccuracies, distortions, myths, calumnies, and wholesale lies about Poland and the Poles propagated abroad.

I have only one disagreement with Dr. Fleischner's article — and that may be merely a question of language. "[A] church that remained so largely silent during the *Shoah*," Dr. Fleischner writes. The church in Poland (and the leading Catholic laity) were in the forefront of a fight to save the victims of the *Shoah*, in spite of punishment and terror unheard of in the rest of occupied Europe. Tens of thousands of Polish *goyim*, mainly Catholics, lost their lives in that cause (some estimates go as high as 200,000). The church that is in Cracow, the church of Cardinal Sapieha, was outstanding in that fight. Ironically, so were the Carmelite sisters nationwide! But then, Dr. Fleischner probably means the church universal which, alas, in the West, was just as silent as everybody else.

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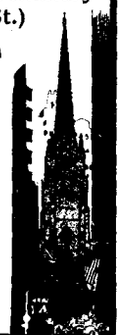

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The raw demonic

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To the Editors: I confess to an ambivalence when it comes to my view of the decision to construct a Carmelite convent at Auschwitz. The ambivalence arises because, generously construed, it seems correct for Catholics to pray at this most revolting of sites. On the other hand, having no doctrine of intercessory prayer, Jews can only regard it as an undertaking to make holy ground out of a place of abomination. Jews have characteristically avoided the sanctification of demonic events. Indeed, were they to have chosen otherwise, Europe would be covered with places commemorating the massacre of Jews. Moreover, the suggestion that Jews establish a Yeshivah at Auschwitz misses the point of Talmud Torah. Jews do not believe that God can be supplicated in this fashion.

The issue becomes even more complex if one reflects on the culpability of the divine at Auschwitz. If God was ultimately responsible for the murders, it seems hardly possible to worship such a God, much less to plead for his intercession. I have argued in *The Tremendum* that we are dealing at Auschwitz with the raw demonic, that God's power is either different from our own or, if similar, the events of the Holocaust cannot but be ultimately ascribed to divine indifference.

What will the Carmelite nuns pray for? A divine change of heart? One hopes so, but believes otherwise. If for the benighted Jews, if for the salvation of the dead in Christ, if for the ultimate vindication of the church, it would be for Jews a blasphemy. How much wiser and more charitable to leave this unhallowed ground unhallowed, unsanctified, unmanipulated by sectarian interest. Auschwitz cannot be redeemed even with prayer.

ARTHUR A. COHEN

Correction:

In Michael Eigen's review of two books by Heinz Kohut (September 12, p. 474), we had him speak three times of "emphatic responsiveness." That should have read "empathetic responsiveness." Apologies, both empathetic and emphatic. THE EDITORS

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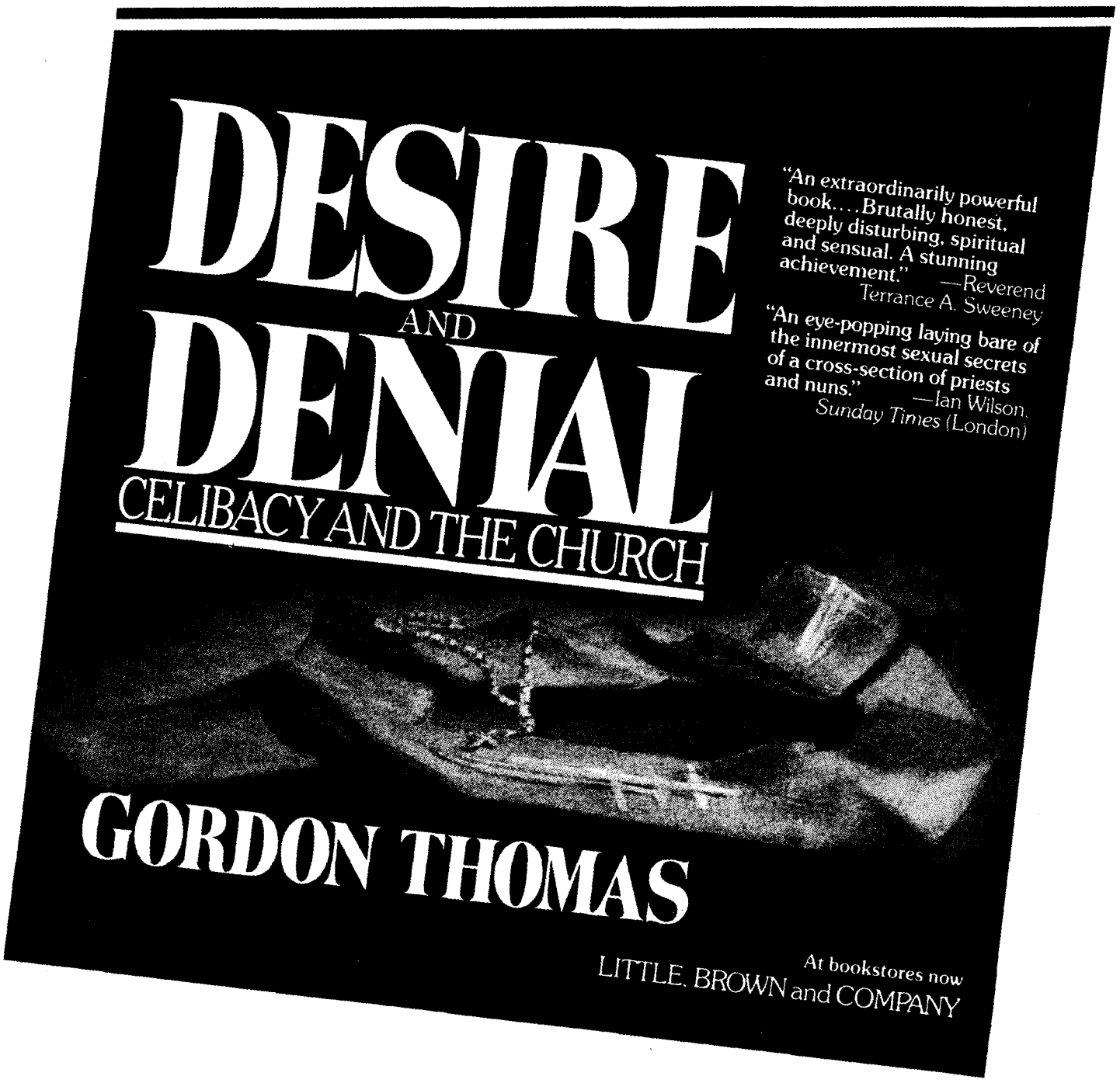
In his review of DESIRE AND DENIAL in the *Washington Post Book World*, Paul Piazza calls the book an **"ecclesiastical blockbuster,"** and says it is **"like eavesdropping on a psychoanalytical session; or like hiding in a convent bedroom taking candid photographs....Readable, thought-provoking, occasionally shocking ...the book exposes all, shrinks from asking nothing, reveals the effects of what theologians call 'grace' and, in the end, redeems itself."**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